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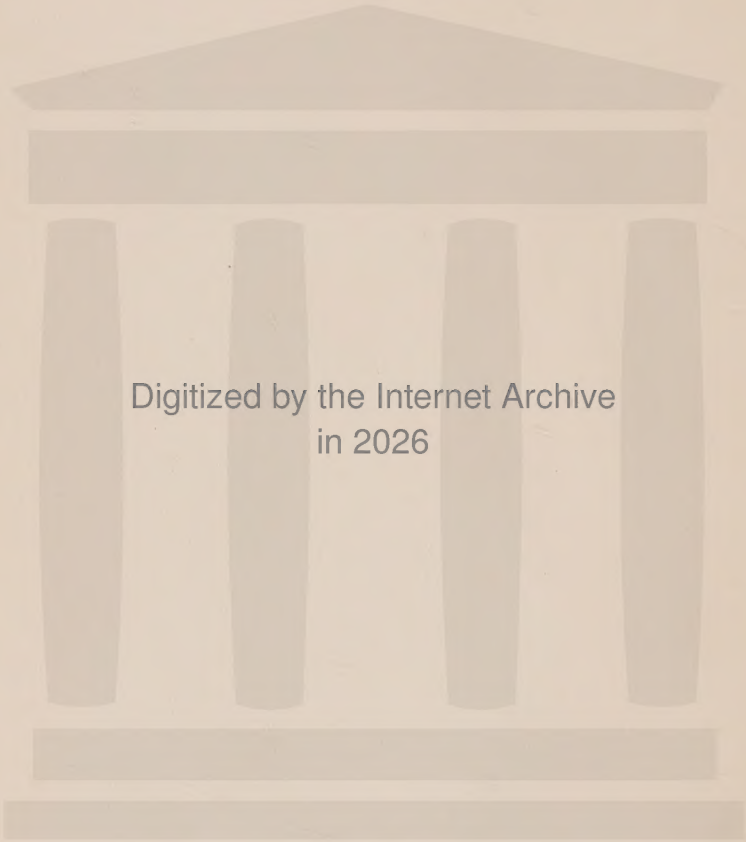
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THREE COMEDIES

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · ATLANTA · SAN FRANCISCO

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LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA
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TORONTO

THREE COMEDIES

By

LOUIS EVAN SHIPMAN

ON PAROLE
THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH
FOOLS ERRANT

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1923
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Dedicated

TO THE PLAYERS WHO BROUGHT
MY COMEDIES TO LIFE

WITH GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE
OF THEIR COLLABORATION

NEW YORK, *January, 1923*

62126

A PREFATORY GREETING

To the Author

Dear Louis:

For about two decades you and I have been neighbors — here on the quiet Cornish hills, under intransient stars, and yonder in the turbulent canyons of Broadway, under stars more ephemeral.

So it is as neighbor and fellow worker, not at all as formal critic, that I venture to write this brief preface to your book; and I trust you will let it take this form of personal God-speed, for I cannot possibly dissociate any work of yours from a distinctive spirit, emanating friendship, which gives it for me a feeling essentially personal and Shipmanesque.

That feeling began nearly twenty years ago. It began on an incomparable morning in Spring. I remember we were driving up together from the station by the Connecticut river, Ascutney looming in royal purple to the southwest: a glorious morning that "flattered the mountain top with sovereign eye."

And you radiated the morning. In your hand was a small volume.

"What's that?" I asked.

"*The Quality of Youth*," you answered; "a little book of mine, just published."

The quality of youth! That, Louis, is the quality of all your works, and always will be, for unescapably it is your own.

That it is which makes them personal in their charm. Not youth in the sense of immaturity; but that inviolate quality of character which carries into philosophic years the courageous fettle and buoyancy of life unashamed to smile. Only that quality of youth could take, with equal thanks, "fortune's buffets and rewards," as you have done.

And so today that quality marks you for perhaps the youngest "Dean" in your profession: Dean of those growing numbers among whom you have seen longest professional service — the Harvard dramatists.

Harvard, however, in your student days, as also in mine, had as yet no dawnings of a creative relationship to the American theatre, or to the drama as a contemporary art. Your apprenticeship was not there. But at a time when New York was still an American city, not yet a world metropolis, Broadway was your first training school as a dramatist — a school then of very distinctive traditions, which you consistently have followed with felicity of dialogue and with a craftsmanship in your own art akin to that of a correlated art of American acting. In this respect the fine initiative of Henry Miller, as actor and manager, has more than once created a rare balance of productive elements, in performing your plays, since he first acted your "D'Arcy of the Guards," in 1901.

During the last three decades no creative worker in the American theatre has been more validly and unostentatiously a lover and close observer of it than yourself. In this affectionate scrutiny you have related your own contributions to a background in art necessarily not exclusive of the English stage and letters, in which the works of Pinero and Henry James have held their lustre of presence.

In the titanic maelstrom of productive elements in New York today, no distinctive traditions of our theatre can survive for long. Out of the blast and counter blast of world forces which beat volcanicly upon Broadway, new portentous creations keep emerging, difficult to evaluate before they vanish again. Hopefully a mightier national spirit, of serener poise, may even now be arising to cope with this maelstrom and to coördinate its forces in traditions of the future more majestic than we have known before.

Perhaps you will chaff me for that hope. From politics to poetry it has long been our prerogative as neighbors to challenge each other's viewpoints with serene gaiety, and to remain incorrigibly ourselves, while varying in opinion all points of the compass except from the undeviating pole of friendship.

But howsoever you may view my latent optimism toward present portents of the theatre, you will agree, I think, that to practise and to preserve what is authentic in living tradition is a valuable contribution to the sequel. This you have done in writing and now in publishing these comedies of yours. Bespeaking, as they do, a spirit authenticly in harmony with a definite tradition of our

theatre which has sustained its charm among audiences, they will appeal to discriminating students of the drama both as dramatic literature and history.

Yours always,

PERCY MACKAYE.

CORNISH, N. H.
12 May, 1923.

THREE COMEDIES

ON PAROLE

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

NEW YORK: MAJESTIC THEATRE

MANAGER: MR. HENRY MILLER

February 25, 1907

CHARACTERS

GENERAL RANDOLPH PINCKNEY	Mr. Frank E. Aiken
CAPTAIN ROBERT PINCKNEY	Mr. Morgan Coman
JUDGE TUCKER ROBINSON	Mr. Scott Cooper
MAJOR FRANCIS DALE	Mr. Vincent Serrano
CAPTAIN ALAN FRASER	Mr. Frederick Forrester
TOM CRESS	Mr. Francis X. Conlan
SAM	Mr. Howard Pembroke
JEFFERSON	Mr. Thomas P. Jackson
CONSTANCE PINCKNEY	Miss Charlotte Walker
MISS POLLY PINCKNEY	Miss Althea Luce
ANITA ROBINSON	Miss Fay Wheeler
LUCY CRESS	Miss Helen Graham

Union and Confederate Soldiers, etc., etc.

SCENARIO

ACT I

Tom Cress's shack on the Rappahannock River, Virginia.
Early Morning.

ACT II

The living room at Pinckney Place.
Late the same day.

ACT III

The same.
Three days later. Night.

ACT IV

The gardens at Pinckney Place.
A year later. Early afternoon.

The action of the play is during the last year of the Civil War, from April, 1864, to the surrender of Lee in April, 1865.

ACT I

SCENE. *A room in Tom Cress's "shack" in eastern Virginia, near the Rappahannock River. The walls of the room show that the cabin is built of logs, the interstices being filled with plaster. At back R. a rough door of planks stands open, and at back L. a square window without sash or glass, on the sill of which stand a couple of geraniums planted in tin cans. At lower R. another rough door leading to an inner room. At upper L. a long ladder goes up to a square hole in the ceiling, which leads to a loft above. At lower L. an ordinary cook stove, and hanging near against the wall a few simple utensils: a broiler, a frying pan, etc. Against the wall near the stove is a cupboard, which is simply a soap box nailed to the wall; on its shelves are a few tin platters and several pieces of simple crockery. Between the door and the window, at back, an old rifle rests on brackets, and underneath it hangs a fiddle and bow. An old clock in a wooden frame stands on shelf, over the gun rack. A plain deal table stands down centre, with two places set for breakfast; there are several plain chairs about. At upper right a few rough pegs hold a couple of old straw hats, faded coats, etc. Under the pegs a chest. Over them pasted against the wall is a picture of General Robert E. Lee, cut from an illustrated paper.*

It is seven o'clock on a bright April morning, 1864. Through the open door and window glimpses of the blue hills and valley may be seen.

AT RISE. *The sound of some one chopping wood comes from off. After a moment it stops, and the voice of Tom Cress may be heard calling: "Sam"—"Oh, you Sam!" A moment after Tom Cress appears in the doorway, his arm piled high with fresh split kindling wood. Tom Cress is a tall, lanky Virginian, something over fifty years old, his sandy hair, moustaches and goatee touched with gray. Having lost a leg in the Mexican War, he stumps around on a wooden one. His kindliness and good humour are covered up with a certain brusqueness. He wears a faded calico shirt, faded blue jeans hitched up with braces, and a boot. His face and hands are browned from exposure. He stops in the doorway and looks about the room and calls:*

CRESS. Sam! [*He looks up to the hole in the ceiling leading to the loft, whence comes the sound of a peaceful morning snore.*] That black rascal is still sleepin'. [*He walks over and drops the kindling in a box near the stove.*] You certainly are the most ornery and worthless nigger in Virginia. [*Calls.*] Sam! Oh, you Sam! [*The snoring continues. Cress puts a couple of sticks on the stove, then moves over to the ladder and shakes it violently.*] Sam! — Sam! [*The snoring ceases and Sam's voice is heard.*] Yes, Marse Tom. I'm comin'. [*Calling up angrily.*] Do you know what I'm goin' to do to you?

[*A moment after Sam's face appears in the aperture above Cress. Sam is an old darky with gray kinky hair. He belongs to Cress. The two men are devoted to each other, but the relative positions of slave and master are strictly observed. Sam is such an old man, and filled with rheumatism, that he is a slave in name only, for Cress does most of the work of the little farm; but he bullies the old man continually and roundly. Sam understands his master perfectly and has no fear of his threats and scoldings.*]

SAM. Did you call, Marse Tom?

CRESS [*disgustedly*]. Did I call! I ain't done nothin' else but call you, all mawnin'. It's seven o'clock now.

SAM [*slowly getting through the hole on to the ladder and descending*]. Bress my soul! I mus' have slep' over myself.

CRESS. I'm not goin' to put up with yo' worthless, shiftless ways any longer.

SAM. I kain't understan' how I come to wake up so late this mawnin', Marse Tom.

CRESS. Well, the reason you didn't wake up earlier, is because you was sleepin' so sound, that you didn't hear me bellowin' at you.

SAM. I declar' it mus' a been dat-a-way. [*Cress walks over to the stove and raises the lid of the coffee pot.*]

CRESS. Yo' been gettin' wuss and wuss ever since Lucy went over to Pinckney Place las' week.

. . . When Miss Lucy's here, I doan' like to have her a totin' chips and water and gettin' brekfus'.

CRESS [*ominously*]. But yo' doan' mind my a havin' to fetch and carry fo' you? Is that it?

SAM. Well, Marse Tom, you'se better able to do it dan Miss Lucy is.

CRESS. Sho' as you're bo'n, Sam, I'd sell you tomorrow ef it 'twan't —

SAM [*interrupting*]. Ef it 'twant you have nobody to sell me to.

CRESS [*pouring a cup of coffee and sitting at the table*]. Ef it 'twant that you was a present to me from ole General Pinckney.

SAM. It wouldn't be very perlite to ole General, for you to sell me away.

CRESS. Perliteness has its limits; an' I think you're one of 'em.

SAM. Marse Hathaway would buy me, I think, ef you want to get rid of me.

CRESS [*puts cup down with clatter angrily*]. Hathaway! That white trash! I wouldn't sell you to Bud Hathaway for five hundred dollars in gold.

SAM [*walks slowly over in the corner and bends over painfully to pick up a tin milk pail. His rheumatism gets the better of him and he straightens up for a moment*]. I on'y thought —

CRESS [*angrily*]. You ain't got no right to think. Bud Hathaway indeed. Well, you can go to Bud Hathaway ef you want.

SAM. I didn' say I want — an' I won't go; I'm a goin' to stay right here.

CRESS [*hurt, attempting a careless tone*]. Oh, no, you needn't to stay. The nex' time a parcel o' those Yankee soldiers come along here, you can jes' go along. I reckon Lucy and I can manage.

SAM [*angrily*]. Yankees! I won't go along with no Yankees.

CRESS. Oh, you might just as well. I hear tell that Abe Lincoln says you're free. Well, mebbe you'd better go and be free.

SAM [*his voice choking*]. Marse Tom, I never thought you'd talk to me like that. [*He bends over once more to get the pail, and shows plainly as he picks it up, how painful it is for him.*]

CRESS [*contritely*]. Yo' got the rheumatiz in yo' back again?

SAM. Dere's a few symptoms.

CRESS. Did yo' rub it with that skunk oil as I tole you to?

SAM. Skunk oil ain't no good any more for me, Marse Tom. I jes' a gettin' old. [*He moves off painfully toward the door.*]

CRESS. Here! Whar you goin'?

SAM. To tote some water.

CRESS. Give me that bucket; you ain't goin' to tote no water.

SAM [*moving on*]. I am goin' to tote de water.

CRESS. Sam!

SAM [*stopping in the doorway*]. Marse Tom.

CRESS. You come here and sit down by the fire; I'll tote that water. [*He moves toward Sam. Sam goes out the door and disappears at R. Cress stumps to the door and shakes his fist after him.*] You're an ornery, ungrateful nigger! [*He stands watching after him for a few moments, then turns back into the room, shaking his head; a scowl on his face. He goes over to the stove and puts some fresh wood in it. A moment after Sam's voice is heard off, calling excitedly.*]

SAM [*off*]. Marse Tom, Marse Tom!
[*Cress moves over quickly to the door, and is met by Sam in great excitement.*]

CRESS. What's ailin' you?

SAM. Marse Tom, there's some one ridin' lickety split this way across the pasture.

CRESS. Sojer?

SAM. No; 'pears to me like a gal.

CRESS [*steps out and he and Sam stand looking off R. strainedly*]. It *is* a gal! you ole fool, an' she's a ridin' for fair. [*After a moment.*] 'Pon my soul ef it don't look to me like Miss Constance.

SAM. Fo' de lo'd's sake! Miss Cons'ance Pinckney!

CRESS [*excitedly*]. Look, Sam! She's a takin' that fence without a quiver.

SAM. Bless ef she ain't!

CRESS. I know it's Miss Constance. There ain't another gal in Virginia that would try that.

SAM. But what's Miss Constance a doin' this time in de mawnin' twenty-five miles from home, an' a comin' in the other direction?

CRESS. In about two minutes I reckon we'll know. Go long there quick an' be ready to take her horse.

[*Sam moves off to R. Cress re-enters the room, goes over to the rack at R., takes a dilapidated coat from the peg, and puts it on, and is interrupted a moment after by Constance Pinckney calling to him from the doorway, as she enters. Constance Pinckney is a girl of twenty-five, whose every lovely feature, intonation and movement betokens breeding: the breeding and manner that has come down through generation after generation of the Virginian gentry. She is impetuous, knows nothing of fear, and her generous nature is overflowing with a conviction of the righteousness of the Southern cause. Her face and hands are browned from much outdoors; she is dressed in a well-fitting riding habit of black cloth, riding boots, and a low black hat of beaver, which carries a long plume of iridescent cocks' feathers. Her riding skirt and boots are badly spattered with mud; a braid of hair has loosened from hard riding, and hangs down. She carries a short riding whip in one hand; around her waist is a black belt supporting a holster with a revolver. Her manner is quick and alert, showing that her nerves are at a tension.*]

CONSTANCE. Helloa, Tom Cress.

CRESS [*wheels around and goes to her quickly, shaking her hand*]. I knew it was you, Miss Constance, when I saw you comin' over that fence.

CONSTANCE. We've got to be quick, Cress; they're after me.

CRESS. After you? Who?

CONSTANCE. The Yankees.

CRESS [*in dismay*]. Yankees!

CONSTANCE. Yes. I ran in to a whole nest of 'em just before daylight. I think they were on the lookout for me.

CRESS [*in amazement*]. Lookin' for you? Whar you bin?

CONSTANCE. I can't explain now; every minute is precious. I've got despatches for General Lee. They've *got* to get through.

CRESS. If one leg's any account, you can hev it.

CONSTANCE. Good. Where's Lucy?

CRESS. Gone over to your house.

CONSTANCE. So much the better; I'll take her place for two or three hours.

CRESS. But ye ain't goin' to stay here? They'll get you sure.

CONSTANCE. They may get me, but they won't get the despatches. I want you to take them, Cress, and get them to Pinckney Place by tonight. Can you do it?

CRESS. I reckon me and the old mule is good for twenty miles between now an' sun-down, ef I push on the lines.

CONSTANCE. Well, push!

CRESS. Whar's your despatches?

CONSTANCE [*tapping her boot with her riding whip*]. Here in my boot. Now listen: first tell Sam to hitch up as soon as he can. [*Cress moves toward the door.*] He's putting my mare up in the woods out of sight. She's pretty well done.

CRESS [*steps outside the door and with his hand to his mouth calls*]. Sam — Oh, Sam. [*Sam's voice may be heard in the distance answering.*]

CRESS. Hook up Jeff Davis there, jest as soon es you can. [*Sam's voice is again heard.*] What? [*Sam's voice again.*] No, I watered him. Lively now. [*He comes back into the room.*] It won't take him long, ef Jeff doesn't kick his head off. He ain't got much of a fancy for niggers.

CONSTANCE. Throw a bag of corn into the wagon.

CRESS. What for?

CONSTANCE. You're going to the mill.

CRESS [*in astonishment*]. To the mill? I thought I was a goin' to Pinckney Place?

CONSTANCE. You are — later.

CRESS. But the Yanks are a comin' that way. I'll run plum into 'em.

CONSTANCE. That's what I want you to do.

CRESS [*scratches his head*]. I kain't see it.

CONSTANCE. Send 'em here; I'll take care of 'em for a while.

CRESS [*dumbfounded*]. You — but —

CONSTANCE [*going on*]. As soon as they're out of sight, you cut across the hill road, then turn around and make tracks for Pinckney Place.

CRESS. And you?

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. I'll give them breakfast and if they feel like chasing me any further, I'll tell them about the short way along the river road.

CRESS. The short way? Why, they'll get up to their saddles in mud. And it's four miles further 'round.

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. The longest way round is the shortest way there — sometimes. May they stick in the mud till the roads dry up!

CRESS [*in delighted amazement*]. Well, ef you ain't a strategist.

CONSTANCE. The despatch is in duplicate and if —

CRESS [*interrupting*]. I thought you said it was in your boot? [*Slightly embarrassed, not being sure what part of a lady's apparel her "duplicate" may be.*] You kin go over yonder in Lucy's room to git it, ef you want. [*He nods toward the door at R.*]

CONSTANCE [*laughing, as she sits in a chair and puts out her foot.*] Cress, you're too modest. Pull. [*Cress pulls*

off a boot.] There we are. [*She reaches into the boot and takes out two folded papers.*] I don't know whether you understand what the safety of these two pieces of paper means, Cress.

CRESS. I'm an old soldier, Miss Constance; you mustn't forget that I lost the use of one of my legs in Mexico, when you was a teeny little gal, not so high.

CONSTANCE. I know, Cress; Pa says to this day that you were the best man in his regiment.

CRESS [*with a glow*]. Does he? I remember at Buny Visty, the General and me was —

CONSTANCE [*interrupting*]. We must hurry, Cress. Take one of these, and remember that the life or death of the South may depend on your getting it to Pinckney Place.

CRESS [*taking the despatch and thrusting it in his shirt*]. I understand.

CONSTANCE. There's a chance of my getting there ahead of you; if I don't, you'll find Bob waiting for you. Give it to him.

CRESS. Is your brother Bob there?

CONSTANCE [*standing up and holding her boots in her hand*]. Yes, waiting for me. Did you say that was Lucy's room? [*Nodding toward door at R.*]

CRESS. Yes. What you goin' to do?

CONSTANCE. Prepare to receive visitors.

CRESS. I'm most afeard to leave you here alone, Miss Constance; they're an ornery crowd, those Yankees.

CONSTANCE. Don't worry about me; you keep your mind on that despatch. How long before you'll be ready to start?

CRESS. I won't be five minutes.

CONSTANCE. Call me before you go. [*She exits quickly at R., carrying her boot in her hand. Cress stands looking after her, scratching his head dubiously. Sam comes limping in from back, carrying pail of water which he puts on bench near clock.*]

CRESS. All ready?

SAM. Yas; but I swar to you, Marse Tom, I'll lam dat mule some day, so he doan' fo'get it. Whar's Miss Constance?

CRESS. In Miss Lucy's room.

SAM. Whar you agoin'?

CRESS. I'm goin' to Pinckney Place.

SAM. To Pinckney Place? Wif Miss Constance?

CRESS. No, Miss Constance is agoin' to stay here.

SAM. Here?

CRESS. For a while; an' I want you to take mighty good care of her an' de house. There's a mess o' Yankee soldiers a chasin' of her, an' ef they come here yo' want to keep yo' eyes open an' yo' mouth shut. Yo' understan'?

SAM. Yas, Marse Tom, I understan'. But ef they're a chasin' of her, I kain't see why she stays here.

CRESS. She's playin' a cute little game on 'em. [*Moves over to the rack and puts on an old felt hat, and reaches up and takes down his gun.*] I'll be back day after tomorrow; mebbe sooner. Don't you fo'get to water them geraniums, an' don't let that blamed ole hog get away in de woods again.

SAM. I'll tend to everything, Marse Tom.

CRESS. Wind the clock, an' keep that game cock shet up tight. He'll kill every one of those roosters ef you don't.

SAM. I'll pull his tail feathers out ef he don't behave himself.

CRESS [*knocks at the door R*]. I'm a goin' now, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE [*off*]. I'm coming.

CRESS [*turning on Sam again*]. An' I want you to use that skunk oil, you hear me?

[*The door at R. opens and Constance comes out. She has taken off her riding habit, and carries it over her arm, and appears in a faded calico frock of Lucy's. Her hair hangs in a braid down her back and a pair of old shoes are on her feet. Sam sees her over Cress's shoulder and his eyes fairly bulge.*]

SAM. Fo' Gawd's sake!

CRESS. What's ailin' — [*He breaks off and turns around.*] Bless ma soul! Ef you ain't a strategist.

CONSTANCE. Think they'll recognize me?

CRESS. Never in the world in those duds.

CONSTANCE. Where'll I put these? [*Her riding dress.*]

CRESS. Over yonder in the old chest.

CONSTANCE [*moves over to chest under pegs and puts the clothes in, laughing*]. If you're ready, you'd better move.

CRESS. Ah'm off this minute.

CONSTANCE [*taking his hand*]. Don't forget anything, Cress. If I don't get to Pinckney Place before you do, tell father and Bob and Aunt Polly not to worry.

CRESS. You can depend on me, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE. I know it. Mind the despatch.

CRESS. I will. [*To Sam.*] Now you, Sam, take care yourself, and mind what yo' about. [*He moves toward the door.*]

SAM. Yas, Marse Tom.

CRESS. Good-bye. [*He exits.*]

CONSTANCE. Good-bye. [*She stands at the door watching after him. Calls out.*] If you don't meet them before you get to the mill, it will be safe to turn up to the hill road.

CRESS [*calling back, off*]. All right.

[*Constance still stands looking after Cress, shading her eyes with her hand. Sam has already climbed on a chair and commenced to wind the clock; he then gets down laboriously and proceeds to deluge the geraniums with water.*]

CONSTANCE [*turns back into the room*]. He's off; God speed him.

SAM [*pouring on more water till it flows over*]. He'd better, Miss Constance; Jeff Davis won't.

CONSTANCE. What *are* you doing, Sam?

SAM. Ef I doan' water these 'ere gereminlys now, I'll never remember in de worl' to do it; and Marse Tom would jes' natchally skin me alive ef anything happen to 'em. All I got to do now is to keep an eye on dat pert game cock, and tell dat razor-back he's got to 'have himself.

CONSTANCE [*sitting at the table*]. Pour me a cup of coffee, Sam; I'm tired out.

SAM [*going to the stove and picking up the pot*]. Yes, indeedy.

CONSTANCE. Did you tie the mare well, up in the woods?

SAM [*pouring coffee into cup*]. Yes'm; tight as a fiddle. We on'y calls this coffee, you know; it's really jes' browned co'n with a little chicory in it.

CONSTANCE [*tasting it*]. It's good. Did you put the chin strap on her, so she couldn't whinny?

SAM. I was pertickler about that; doan' want her talkin' to any Yankee hosses, if dey happen along.

CONSTANCE. Look out and see if there's anyone in sight, Sam.

SAM [*goes over to door, and looking out*]. No'm, not a symptom. Marse Tom's way out o' sight too. Reckon he ain't goin' to take no foolin' from Jeff Davis today.

CONSTANCE. Who named that mule Jeff Davis?

SAM. Marse Tom.

CONSTANCE. Why?

SAM. I guess 'case he's allus kickin' over de traces.

CONSTANCE. Sam!

SAM [*apologetically*]. 'Tain't my mule, Miss Constance. I tole Marse Tom it was sort o' sacrilegious.

CONSTANCE [*rising*]. I'm surprised at your master, Sam.

SAM. Yes'm.

CONSTANCE. Now, Sam, if any Yankee soldiers turn up here, remember I'm Miss Lucy Cress.

SAM [*laughing*]. I ain't goin' to forget dat, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE [*looking about*]. Tell me, where do you keep your corn meal?

SAM. Co'n meal? Over yonder in de pantry. [*Nodding toward door at lower L.*]

CONSTANCE. I'm going to make some Johnny cake.

SAM [*moving toward the pantry door*]. Fo' de Lawd's sake! We ain't had no Johnny cake since Miss Lucy went over to Pinckney Place.

CONSTANCE [*following him*]. Well, now that Miss Lucy is here, we'll have some.

[*They exit into the pantry. The sound of horses' feet pounding on the turf may be heard coming closer; Sam's voice is heard talking to Constance and hers in reply. The jingle of cavalry accoutrements can be heard and a voice giving a command. Sam re-enters from the pantry.*]

SAM [*standing in the doorway and talking back to Constance*]. Ef there's anything you kaint find jes' call me; I'll put a couple of sticks on the fire. [*He moves over and puts sticks on the fire. At this moment Major Dale and Captain Fraser enter from the door at back. Dale is a man of thirty-five, quick, alert, soldierly, with distinction and breeding, and with an easy humour that covers his intensity. Fraser is his junior by five years, and has none of his superior's coolness, being more impetuous. They both show the wear and tear of hard army service. They are dressed in the uniforms of the United States Army, and their boots and clothes are mud-spattered from hard riding. At the sound of their entering, Sam turns quickly and faces them, then gives a scared look toward the pantry.*]

DALE. Good morning, uncle.

SAM. Mawnin' marsters.

DALE. Where's your master?

SAM. Gon' to the mill.

FRASER [*to Dale*]. That must have been old one-leg we met down the road.

DALE. Yes. [*To Sam.*] Seen any strangers this morning?

SAM. No, marser.

DALE [*looking sharply*]. No one riding by, man or woman?

SAM. No, marser; to tell de truf, I was fearful late a gettin' round dis mawnin' an' a whole regiment might a gone by for all me.

DALE. Get outside and show the men where to water their horses.

SAM. Yes, marsers. [*He limps out at back, casting a furtive glance at the pantry door.*]

FRASER. He doesn't know anything.

DALE. If he does, you can't make him tell. [*Drawing off his gauntlets and slapping them on the table.*] But I tell you, Fraser, I'm going to get that girl if we have to ride in to Lee's headquarters for her.

FRASER [*laughing*]. Show the way, Major, and I'll follow.

DALE. Well, we may not have to go that far; I haven't given up the chase yet by a long shot. She can't be very far ahead of us.

FRASER. It's a question now which road to take.

DALE. We'll give the boys a breathing spell before we decide. I'm afraid to separate the command.

FRASER. It would hardly do; we might walk into trouble.

DALE. The whole thing is damned vexatious. It was only the night before last that the General put me on to it. "There's leakage, Dale," he said, "and it's been going on for six months." Then he told me of this girl or woman, who has been seen several times, but seen only to disappear.

FRASER. The same trick she played us.

DALE. That's the funny part, or it would be if it were a joke: we were on the lookout for her, or for somebody, and she gave us the slip.

FRASER. She had a good mount?

DALE. No excuse, we should have had her. It is just this: Lee has had accurate information beforehand of every move we've made for the last six months, and that information bureau has got to be smashed.

FRASER. You think this girl is an important part of it?

DALE. I think she is it.

FRASER. What do you propose to do?

DALE. Get her today if possible; if not we'll gather as much information as we can, and then just lay for her.

FRASER. Information is a pretty scarce commodity in this country, Major.

DALE. Well, she manages to get plenty of it. I've got a plan though.

FRASER. What?

DALE. A few miles beyond here, I don't know exactly how many, there's a big plantation called Pinckney Place.

FRASER. Yes.

DALE [*taking a soiled and worn map out of his inner pocket and spreading it on the table*]. It's about there. [*Pointing.*] I've had a couple of reports on it.

FRASER. Any one living there?

DALE. The proprietor, an old fire-eater named Pinckney, General Pinckney. Holds a sort of feudal state there. And from all I hear it's a rendezvous for every rebel spy, straggler, and foraging party.

FRASER. We may discover the headquarters of the information bureau.

DALE. Exactly, and it won't hurt to have a look at it.

FRASER. We can make it by this early afternoon.

DALE. Yes, if we're not side-tracked. [*There is a sound off L. of the rhythmic beat of a spoon against a bowl.*] What's that?

FRASER [*listens for a moment*]. Somebody in there; I'll see. [*He makes a move toward the pantry door, when Constance appears on the threshold. In her arm she holds a large yellow crock, and she is beating and stirring the contents with a big spoon. She stops, as if surprised at seeing the two officers, though as a matter of fact she has overheard their whole conversation.*]

CONSTANCE [*she speaks with the drawl, and uses the expressions of a country girl*]. Mawnin'.

DALE [*surprised. Politely taking off his cap*]. Good morning. Where did you come from?

CONSTANCE. That's jest what I was a goin' to ask you.

DALE [*smiling*]. We are strangers in a strange land.

CONSTANCE. 'Pear to be Yankees.

FRASER [*smiling*]. The original colour of our coats was blue.

CONSTANCE. 'Tain't so welcome 'round here as gray.

DALE. That's the theory on which we're travelling. Tell me, was that your father we met just as we came out of the woods?

CONSTANCE. Dunno. Did he hev a mule, and one leg?

FRASER. They were both with him.

CONSTANCE. Guess that was dad goin' to the mill.

[*She moves over to the stove, puts the bowl down, takes a pan from the wall, greases it with some fat she finds wrapped in a rag in the cupboard, pours the batter from the bowl into the pan, and places it in the oven of the stove, then puts a couple of sticks on the fire. All this during the ensuing dialogue.*]

DALE. Haven't seen any one, man or woman, go by this morning?

CONSTANCE. Nope.

DALE. You wouldn't lie to me, would you?

CONSTANCE. I might.

DALE. What would it depend on?

CONSTANCE. Whether I thought you'd believe me or not.

DALE. H'm. [*To Fraser.*] Frank anyhow.

FRASER [*nods*]. If you haven't seen any one go by, have you seen any one stop here this morning? Do you *know* whether anyone stopped here this morning?

CONSTANCE. There ain't no one been in this house this morning but me, and Dad, and Sam [*hesitating*] 'cept —

DALE. Except who?

CONSTANCE. Except you two Yankees. You can look if you want. There's my room [*pointing to R.*].

There's Dad's room through the pantry [*pointing to L.*] and Sam roosts up there [*pointing to the hole in the ceiling*].

FRASER [*to Dale*]. It won't do any harm.

DALE. No, take a look.

[*Fraser exits at R., then reappears and exits at L.; reappears again and climbs the ladder and exits to the loft, all during the following dialogue.*]

CONSTANCE [*as Fraser exits at R.*]. Who ye lookin' fur anyhow?

DALE [*sits near the table and watches with evident interest the handsome girl*]. We're looking for a very dangerous person.

CONSTANCE. Dangerous to who? The Yankees?

DALE. Yes.

CONSTANCE. What's he done?

DALE. It isn't a he; it's a she.

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. A gal? [*Pointing out the window.*] You don't mean to say that it takes you all to hunt for a gal?

DALE. But she's a very exceptional girl.

CONSTANCE. What's that?

DALE. She's not like other girls.

CONSTANCE. What's she been a doin'?

DALE [*smiling*]. She's been finding out about us Yankees, and going to General Lee to tell him all about it.

CONSTANCE. I reckon she must be a pretty smart one to get away from you all.

DALE [*easily*]. Oh, I'll get her.

CONSTANCE. Mebbe.

DALE. Yes, it's always good to put in a maybe.

CONSTANCE. How ye goin' to git her?

DALE [*laughing*]. Ah, if I were to tell you that you'd know as much as I do.

CONSTANCE. I reckon that wouldn't hurt me.

[*Fraser climbs down from the loft. Constance moves over to the stove and stoops down to look in the oven, takes out the Johnny cake and turns it out on the table, during dialogue between Fraser and Dale.*]

DALE [*to Fraser*]. Nothing, eh?

FRASER. Not a sign.

DALE. Well, straighten out the command and we'll move.

FRASER. Very well. Have you inquired about the roads?

DALE. No, I don't suppose there's much choice though. [*To Constance.*] Do you know of a plantation round here called Pinckney Place?

CONSTANCE [*almost startled, looking up quickly*]. Pinckney Place? Reckon I do; Dad was brought up there.

DALE. How far from here?

CONSTANCE. 'Bout eighteen miles.

DALE. Which is the best road?

CONSTANCE. The upper road.

DALE. Why?

CONSTANCE. Cos it is.

[*Dale and Fraser exchange glances, as much as to say they know she is lying. Dale whispers aside to Fraser. Constance, by the window, picks a geranium blossom, and idly twists it in her fingers.*]

FRASER [*as if replying to Dale's whispered comment*]. I think you're right. I'll tell you when the men are mounted.

DALE. Very good.

[*Fraser salutes and exits at back.*]

DALE. Anybody live at Pinckney Place?

CONSTANCE. Ole General Pinckney, Miss Polly, his sister, an' Miss Constance.

DALE. Do you know them?

CONSTANCE. Yep.

DALE. Like them?

CONSTANCE. Middlin'. All 'cept Miss Constance.

DALE. What's the matter with her?

CONSTANCE. Too stuck up.

DALE. Stuck up about what?

CONSTANCE. Ain't ever been able to find out. She's ez homely ez a mud fence an' jes' generally disagreeable.

DALE [*laughs*]. Do you think we could get a night's lodging there?

CONSTANCE. Ef there's enough of you, I reckon they'll hev to let you have it.

DALE. I don't suppose we would have a particularly cordial welcome.

CONSTANCE. Reckon not. General Pinckney's father, and his father's father, and all his folks way before that were Virginians.

DALE [*laughing*]. So were my people, all of them Virginians.

CONSTANCE [*flashing out at him, for a moment almost forgetting herself*]. You! A Virginian!

DALE [*amused at her vehemence*]. Yes, just as much a one as General Pinckney, or your father is.

CONSTANCE [*dropping back to her country accent, but with her scorn of him unconcealed*]. An' you ain't ashamed to be a wearin' that coat, an' fightin' against your own kin?

DALE. They're fightin' against me.

CONSTANCE. Well, ef folks hez got to fight, there's somethin' in bein' on the right side.

DALE. But, my dear young lady, who is to decide which is the right side? There is, at least at present, a difference of opinion.

CONSTANCE. Anybody who is agin Virginia is on the wrong side.

DALE [*smiling*]. I'll come back some day soon, and well talk that over together.

CONSTANCE. I'm goin' away tomorrow.

DALE. Where?

CONSTANCE. To Richmond.

DALE [*smiling*]. Richmond! I may see you there, who knows, before very long.

CONSTANCE [*retorting quickly*]. Most of the Yankee prisoners go to Andersonville.

DALE [*laughs out*]. Well, if we don't happen to run across each other again, remember this: that you have met one Virginian who cared more for his country than he did for his state.

CONSTANCE [*carelessly*]. I don't know ef that's particularly worth rememberin'. What's your name anyhow?

DALE. My name's Dale.

CONSTANCE [*quickly*]. You ain't one of the Fauquier County Dales?

DALE [*looking at her curiously*]. What do you know about them?

CONSTANCE [*seeing she has made a slip*]. Oh, nothin': jest heard of 'em.

DALE. I'm from Fauquier County.

CONSTANCE [*cuttingly*]. They must be proud of you.

DALE [*a little nettled*]. I hope they may never have cause to feel ashamed of me. [*Sam re-enters from back.*] Are they ready for me out there, uncle?

SAM. They're a gettin' on their horses.

DALE [*drawing on his gauntlet*]. And I must get on mine. [*With a quizzical look at Constance.*] You advise the upper road, do you?

[*Sam gives a startled look at Constance to which she gives no heed, but which is not lost on Dale.*]

CONSTANCE. I don't advise ye; I only tell ye the upper way is the shortest way, ef you're bound to go to Pinckney Place.

DALE. There's where I'm bound to go.
[*Fraser appears at the door*]

FRASER [*saluting*]. All ready, Major.

DALE. I'm with you. [*Putting out his hand.*] Good-bye.

CONSTANCE [*looks him full in the face and puts her hands behind her; as she does so she drops the geranium blossom*]. Mawnin'.

DALE [*stoops and picks up the flower, and presents it to her. She shakes her head, and he puts it in his button-hole, with a little smile*]. Good morning.
[*He and Fraser exit at back R.*]

SAM [*eagerly*]. What did you tell 'em about the hill road bein' the short way fur, Miss Constance? They'll get Marse Tom sho' as shootin'.

CONSTANCE [*moving toward the door, in a low voice as if talking to herself*]. I took a chance. [*She looks out off R., Sam peering out too. The sound of jingling accoutrements and horses' hoofs pounding off is heard.*] They're off!

SAM [*after a moment, in astonishment*]. Bress my soul, Miss Constance, ef they're not turnin' down to the river road! Sho' as yo' bo'n.

CONSTANCE [*watching after them a moment*]. Yes, they're taking the river road, Sam. [*She draws a long breath as she turns back into the room.*] Thank God! I hoped they wouldn't believe me. I'll get there before them.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. *The living room at Pinckney Place. At back centre, a long, broad, double-recessed window to the floor letting on to a terrace. At upper L. and at lower L. doors; and at upper and lower R. The woodwork of the room is cream-coloured except the doors, which are mahogany with glass knobs. The wall spaces are covered by a light wooden panelling to within about two feet of the ceiling. A faded flowered carpet is on the floor. At the windows are curtains of dimity, and across the recess are heavy, flowered chintz curtains. Between the doors at R. a mahogany desk with glass doored bookcase top. At R. of centre door front a large round majogany table, on which are books, lamp, papers and a large bowl of spring flowers. At L. of table a "grandfather's chair" upholstered in chintz; at R. of table and cat-a-cornered to it a Hepplewhite sofa, upholstered in rose pink, a mahogany footstool nearby. Against the wall at back L. a mahogany table with candlesticks, over it hung against the panelling a portrait. At R. back another small table over which is a mirror.*

TIME. *Seven hours after the preceding act.*

AT RISE. *General Pinckney and his sister, Miss Polly Pinckney, discovered. The General is an old gentleman nearing seventy. Tall, distinguished, gentle-mannered, gray haired and with a gray mustache. He wears a long black frock coat and uses a cane. Miss Polly is a precise, kindly little lady, some years younger than the General. She is dressed in a faded brown silk gown, trimmed with narrow velvet ribbon, and wears a lace cap.*

The General is standing looking out of the window at back; Miss Polly sits near the table knitting industriously on a woolen sock; her ball of yarn on the floor, and her silk sewing bag beside her.

GENERAL [*turns from the window and comes down to table at L.*]. Not a sign of her yet; I don't know what to make of it, Polly.

MISS POLLY. It isn't three o'clock yet.

GENERAL. But she has never been as late as this.

MISS POLLY. Now, Randolph, don't begin to worry.

GENERAL. I'm not beginning. I worry from the moment she starts on one of these mad journeys till she's back again.

MISS POLLY. I have never approved of it, you know that, Randolph. Why you allow it is beyond my comprehension.

GENERAL [*smiling grimly*]. I don't know why I allow it. Why is it the wind blows without my permission?

MISS POLLY. But *she's* your daughter.

GENERAL. I suppose that is sufficient explanation for any vagary. But I promise you, Polly, once home safe, she shall never attempt it again. I've given my boy and nearly everything in the world I possess; and God knows, the South could have me too if I wasn't worn out, useless. But they can't have my girl.

MISS POLLY. You must tell Bob.

GENERAL. Bob never wanted her to do it in the beginning.

MISS POLLY. Oh, I know, Randolph, how it all began, but that was an emergency.

GENERAL. Every day of our life now is an emergency.

MISS POLLY [*impatiently*]. If General Lee hadn't sent her that letter complimenting her.

GENERAL. Well she does accomplish things that no man could; since the Yankees have been closing in about us here, it would be impossible for Bob or anyone else to get around with as little risk.

[*Lucy Cress enters from lower R.; on her arm a bundle of old linen. As she moves across the room toward R., Miss Polly looks up.*]

MISS POLLY. Oh, Lucy, did you find the old linen?

LUCY. Yas'm; I was just goin' up to the rose-room, to scrape some more lint.

MISS POLLY. Very well. I'll be up after awhile.

LUCY. Is there any word of Miss Constance yet?

MISS POLLY. No, but she can't be long now. [*Lucy crosses to L. and exists at lower L.*] Lucy is turning out a very good girl.

GENERAL. Tom Cress's daughter should turn out a good girl.

[*Jefferson, a dignified old darky house-servant, enters from upper L.*]

JEFFERSON. Judge Robinson has jes' drove up, General.

GENERAL [*with pleasure*]. Judge Robinson? Tell him to come right in, Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah.

MISS POLLY. I didn't know the Judge was back from Richmond.

GENERAL. Nor I. Where's Mr. Bob, Jefferson?

JEFFERSON [*at the door, turning*]. He went off down the road, 'bout half an hour ago, sah. [*He exits at upper L.*]

GENERAL. He's gone to see if he can catch sight of her.

MISS POLLY. He's been in a fidget all day. What if she should be caught, Randolph?

GENERAL. Well, she's not a spy.

MISS POLLY. The Yankees don't make fine distinctions.

GENERAL [*making an effort to throw off the ominous suggestion*]. Oh, but she's not going to be caught. She knows every road and by-way in the country, and she has the best mount in the state.

[*Judge Tucker Robinson and his daughter, Anita, enter from upper L. The Judge is a distinguished-*

looking old gentleman near the General's age. Anita is a fresh, charming young girl of nineteen.]

JUDGE [*going to Miss Polly and bending gallantly over her hand*]. Good mawnin', Miss Polly.

ANITA [*the General steps to her and takes her hand*]. Good mornin', General.

MISS POLLY. How d'ye do, Judge?

GENERAL [*cordially to the Judge, while Anita moves over to Miss Polly*]. Well, Tucker, it's good to see you. When did you get back from Richmond?

JUDGE [*shaking hands with the General, as Anita and Miss Polly greet one another in dumb show, Anita sitting near her*]. Got back yesterday; and Anita and I thought we'd ride over this mawnin' and see how you all were. How are you, Randolph?

GENERAL [*laughing*]. Oh, I'm a month older than when I saw you last.

JUDGE. That's a bad symptom.

MISS POLLY. He's very careless, Judge.

GENERAL. I can't command the sun to stand still.

JUDGE [*smiling*]. How about the daughter —

MISS POLLY. Off again.

ANITA. Isn't Constance here? [*Miss Polly shakes her head.*]

JUDGE. Despatches?

GENERAL. Yes, been gone since day before yesterday. We're expecting her every minute.

JUDGE. Is she late?

GENERAL. She should have been here by noon.

JUDGE. The roads are abominable.

ANITA. She wouldn't come by the river road?

GENERAL. No, the hill road.

JUDGE. Well, we mustn't begin to worry yet.

MISS POLLY. Anxiety is a hard thing to reason about, Judge.

GENERAL. It is the last time, Tucker, I shall let her go. We've all made sacrifices enough without having to put our women in the field.

ANITA. I only wish I had the chance.

GENERAL [*as they all smile*]. You! And what would you like to do, Anita?

ANITA. Fight.

JUDGE. We'll keep you as reserve till the Yankees get too close to Richmond.

MISS POLLY. Good gracious, Judge. There's no danger of that, is there?

JUDGE. They've been crying, "On to Richmond" now for three years, but they're not on yet.

GENERAL. Is it so that Grant has been put in command of all the Northern forces?

JUDGE. Yes, and the President feels that the coming year will be a decisive one.

GENERAL. Grant has never had Lee to face before.

JUDGE. President Davis is confident of the result.

MISS POLLY. Who is Grant?

GENERAL. That's what we all wanted to know before he took Vicksburg.

JUDGE. President Davis remembers him in the old army. He was lieutenant in the 4th Infantry. Did you ever meet him, Randolph?

GENERAL. I remember hearing of him in the Mexican campaign. He resigned after the war, I think.

JUDGE. Well, he's not afraid to fight.

ANITA. We've taught all the Yankees how to do that.

GENERAL. They're pretty good pupils, Anita. Is there nothing definite from England or France, Tucker?

JUDGE. They've checkmated us so far in both London and Paris. Though President Davis assures me that the Emperor would gladly recognize our standing if the Queen's government could be persuaded.

GENERAL. Money, money, money. That's what we need, Tucker.

JUDGE [*laughing*]. Well they're making it as fast as they can print it, in Richmond.

GENERAL. That's what's ruining us. [*Jefferson enters from upper R.*] Well, Jefferson?

JEFFERSON. 'Scuse me, General, but the two barrels of flour you o'dered has come.

MISS POLLY. I gave you the money to pay for them this morning, Jefferson.

JEFFERSON [*apologetically*]. You on'y gave me six hundred dollars, Miss Polly.

MISS POLLY. Well?

JEFFERSON. De price is raised.

GENERAL. Raised?

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah; it's fo' hundred dollars a barrel.

GENERAL. Four hundred dollars?

MISS POLLY. This is simply outrageous, Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

JUDGE [*laughing*]. You won't need any yeast, Miss Polly, with flour that rises like that.

GENERAL. I'll attend to it, Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah. [*Exits at upper R.*]

GENERAL [*moving over to desk and taking a roll of bills from one of the drawers*]. Come, Tucker, let's investigate these flour barrels; and we'll walk down the road a piece; we may meet Bob.

JUDGE. I'm with you, Randolph. Miss Polly, you'll have to make smaller loaves.

MISS POLLY. We can do without any if it's necessary, Judge.

ANITA [*gaily*]. If we can't have bread we can have cake — corn cake, General.

GENERAL. That's so, Anita.

JUDGE. We won't be long. Come, Randolph. [*He and the General exit at upper R.*]

MISS POLLY. The General is so worried about Constance, he can't sit still.

ANITA. Isn't he worried about Bob?

MISS POLLY. That's different. When a man goes to war you give him up, and shut your heart tight, neither hoping nor expecting.

ANITA. What a horror it all is, Miss Polly!

MISS POLLY [*wiping her eyes furtively with her handkerchief*]. But when a girl like Constance goes out, taking up a man's task, risking dangers that are only for men: it's too cruel, too awfully cruel, child. We shouldn't have that to bear.

ANITA. I can't understand why the General allowed it.

MISS POLLY. It was all very well the first time. Bob was taken down here with the fever; couldn't lift his head, let alone his horse; and the despatches he carried simply had to get through. Well, you know how she did it. Quicker than it had ever been done before.

ANITA. But she carried them several times.

MISS POLLY. General Lee wrote her a letter thanking and complimenting her; and after that nothing could stop her. Oh, what a folly it's all been. [*Robert Pinckney enters at upper L. He is a handsome young Confederate officer of thirty. His face and hands are browned from exposure, his uniform shabby from long use, his cavalry boots mud-spattered. He is quick, alert, and intense in temperament. Miss Polly stops her work and looks up expectantly.*] Oh, Bob, has she come?

BOB [*comes down quickly to Anita, who rises and makes no attempt to conceal her pleasure*]. Anita!

ANITA [*holding his hand*]. No sight of Constance?

BOB. Nothing.

MISS POLLY. Your father and Judge Robinson just went out.

BOB. Yes, I saw them. [*To Anita.*] They told me you were here. I thought you were still in Richmond.

ANITA. Pa had to come, and I made him bring me.

MISS POLLY [*folding up her sewing, and rising*]. You'll stay to supper, Anita.

ANITA. It depends on Pa.

MISS POLLY. You'll be here, Bob?

BOB. No, Aunt Polly, I've got to move.

MISS POLLY. But — but if Constance doesn't come?

BOB. If she isn't here in half an hour [*looking at his watch*] I'll start out after her. I can get as far as Tom Cress's tonight.

MISS POLLY. I'll be in the kitchen; call me before you go.

BOB. I will, Aunt Polly.

MISS POLLY [*smiling; to Anita*]. I have to see that that flour doesn't fly away.

ANITA. Yes, indeed. [*Miss Polly exits at upper R.*]

BOB [*smiling*]. What's the matter with the flour?

ANITA [*laughing back at him*]. Four hundred dollars a barrel.

BOB. It's worth more than that if it demands Aunt Polly's attention at this minute.

ANITA. She knows.

BOB. What it's worth?

ANITA. Yes — for us to be alone.

BOB. I tried to get leave last month, but couldn't.

ANITA. I know: you wrote me. It was on the chance of finding you here, that I came with Pa.

BOB. Really?

ANITA. No other reason. [*He kisses her gravely.*]

BOB. If you only knew, Anita, how the weeks drag, and drag, and drag. I haven't seen you since February, and now it's April.

ANITA. Do you think I haven't counted the days? And days weren't made to count: they were made to live in. Oh, Bob, when is it all going to end?

BOB. Not till we've whipped them.

ANITA. But we all thought it was going to be so easy.

BOB. So did they.

ANITA. There's no comfort in that.

BOB. War and comfort have nothing to do with one another. [*The door at upper L. opens quickly and Jefferson enters excitedly.*]

JEFFERSON. Masr Bob, Masr Bob, she's come! She's come!

ANITA. Constance!

BOB. Miss Constance? Where is she?

JEFFERSON. She's comin' right in, Masr Bob. [*Holds the door open and looks out. Bob and Anita move toward the door.*] Here she is.

[*Constance enters quickly, and Bob takes her in his arms.*]

CONSTANCE. Bob!

BOB. Constance!

ANITA. Oh, Constance!

CONSTANCE [*turning to her and kissing*]. You here too, Anita? How splendid!

BOB. What has kept you? We've been on pins and needles.

CONSTANCE. Jefferson, see that Alex rubs the mare down well. Tell him not to feed her for an hour yet.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm. [*He exits at upper L.*]

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. My dear Bob, I've at last had an adventure.

ANITA. At last?

BOB. Are the despatches safe?

CONSTANCE. Right as a trivet. [*She fumbles in the bosom of her dress and takes them out.*] Here. [*Hands them to Bob.*] And you're lucky to get them.

BOB. Trouble, eh. See any Yankees?

CONSTANCE. See any!

BOB. Did they chase you?

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. They not only chased me, but they caught me.

ANITA. Caught you!

BOB. What do you mean?

CONSTANCE. They caught me, but they didn't know it.

BOB [*bewildered*]. They caught you! You mean —

ANITA [*echoing his amazement*]. The Yankees!

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. The Yankees — and rather good-looking ones, too, Anita.

BOB. But I don't understand, did they —

ANITA [*interrupting*]. You saw them?

BOB. And talked to them?

CONSTANCE. Yes; and my dear, one of them was very like a gentleman.

BOB. Tell us everything.

CONSTANCE. I can't tell you everything, for you've got to be moving.

BOB. Why?

CONSTANCE. They're coming here.

ANITA. Here?

BOB. When?

CONSTANCE. They would have been here an hour ago if they had followed my directions.

BOB [*blankly*]. Followed your directions!

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. I told them to take the hill road, but they *would* go the river way.

ANITA. From where?

CONSTANCE. They caught me at Tom Cress's. I got there a few minutes ahead of them, and just in time to adopt Tom, when they arrived.

BOB. Adopt Tom?

CONSTANCE. For the time being I am Lucy.

ANITA [*laughing incredulously*]. Lucy Cress, in that frock?

CONSTANCE. Oh, it didn't take long to change my toilette, and make ready to receive company.

BOB. How many were there?

CONSTANCE. There must have been eighteen or twenty of them, Bob, under the command of a Major Dale.

BOB [*in astonishment*]. You don't mean Dale of the Yankee Intelligence Department?

CONSTANCE. Must be, for he's pretty keen after information, and has more now than is good for us. What do you know about him?

BOB. Nothing except what I've heard. Everybody has heard of him. He's dangerous.

CONSTANCE. Seemed to know all about Pinckney Place. I overhead him telling one of his officers.

BOB. What are they after?

CONSTANCE. Me — and incidentally any information they can get.

ANITA. But you can't stay here, if they're coming.

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. Think they'll recognize me? Well, they may but they won't know it. I'll attend to that. Where's Pa?

ANITA. The General and Pa went out just a moment ago to see if there was any sign of you.

CONSTANCE. That's just as well, for there's no use of worrying him. I have a plan, Bob, oh, a glorious plan.

BOB. For what?

CONSTANCE. For appropriating this whole Yankee Command. I want to make their visit to Pinckney Place a memorable one.

BOB [*eagerly*]. How are we going to do it?

CONSTANCE. Can you get to headquarters and back here with a hundred men in a week?

BOB. Sooner. Three or four days.

CONSTANCE. Then do it. This Major Dale is worth getting. He knows too much.

BOB [*doubtfully*]. But you can't keep them here.

CONSTANCE [*confidently*]. I can try — and Anita will help. Won't you, dear?

ANITA. How?

CONSTANCE [*mischievously*]. As circumstances dictate.

ANITA [*doubtfully*]. Yes — but —

BOB. What can you do?

CONSTANCE. Oh, 'rouse their curiosity and interest.

BOB. In what?

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. Pinckney Place — and its occupants. Don't you think a dashing young cavalry officer might find Pa and Aunt Polly interesting?

BOB. Now, Constance.

CONSTANCE. Well, what's the difference how we entertain them, as long as you get back here in time and make it worth while!

ANITA. Constance is right, Bob. You get back here as soon as you can, and don't worry about the entertainment committee.

BOB. But I hate to have you two mixed up in this sort of thing.

CONSTANCE [*laughing*]. When one lives in stirring times one must expect to get mixed.

BOB. You make a joke of everything sort of,—bless your little heart.

CONSTANCE [*gaily*]. I'm going to make a joke of those Yankees. If you think they can chase me half the night, and most of the day, and nearly frighten me to death, without my getting quits, then I'm not your sister, Bob Pinckney.

BOB [*laughing*]. I haven't time to argue about it. But do you think you can do it?

CONSTANCE. There's no harm trying. Nothing lost if we fail; but think of the beauty of succeeding.

ANITA. Oh, Bob! Wouldn't it be splendid! [*He takes her in his arms.*]

BOB. Worth trying hard for.

CONSTANCE. If we could hand this wonderful Major Dale and his friends over to you, Bob, I would forgive them the scare they gave me.

BOB. How about father?

CONSTANCE. There's no use worrying Pa by telling him about it. He'll be bothered enough having a parcel of Yankees around the place.

BOB. All right. I'll leave him to you. [*Takes his hat from the table.*]

ANITA. Is your horse saddled?

BOB. All ready.

[*Miss Polly enters from upper R., followed by Jefferson who stands by grinning during the ensuing scene.*]

MISS POLLY [*goes quickly and joyfully to Constance*]. My dear child!

CONSTANCE [*embracing her*]. Aunt Polly! Oh, Aunt Polly, I'm so glad to see you.

MISS POLLY. What a scare you've given us, child. Hasn't she, Bob?

BOB. Horrible! I'm off now, Aunt Polly.

MISS POLLY. Off? Starting back?

BOB. Yes.

CONSTANCE. He hasn't any time to spare either.

MISS POLLY. But why so soon?

BOB [*kissing her*]. Constance will explain.

MISS POLLY. God keep you, my boy. You will see your father?

BOB. Oh, yes. I'll meet him. [*Kissing Constance.*] Good-bye, sis.

CONSTANCE. Good-bye, Bob. Back as soon as you can, mind.

BOB. The very minute. [*To Anita.*] Good-bye.

ANITA. I'm going out with you.

BOB [*to Jefferson*]. Good-bye, Jeff.

CONSTANCE. Good luck! I'll get word to you if I can. [*He exits at L., followed by Anita, and Jefferson crosses over after them.*]

JEFFERSON [*stopping near the door*]. Yes, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE [*to Miss Polly*]. Where's Lucy Cress?

MISS POLLY. I think she's sewing up in the rose-room.

CONSTANCE. Tell Miss Lucy that I want to see her here.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

CONSTANCE. And Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

CONSTANCE. There are some Yankee soldiers coming here this afternoon.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

MISS POLLY [*in consternation*]. Coming here!

CONSTANCE. Yes. [*To Jefferson.*] I don't know how long they'll be around, but I want you to see that the servants don't *talk*.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

CONSTANCE. You understand: not a word.

JEFFERSON. I understand perfectly, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE. About me or Mr. Bob or anybody.

JEFFERSON. Not a word to nobody about nobody. [*Jefferson exits at lower L.*]

MISS POLLY. How do you know Yankee soldiers are coming here?

CONSTANCE. They told me.

MISS POLLY [*in amazement*]. Told you! What are they coming for?

CONSTANCE. Me.

MISS POLLY. Constance Pinckney, what are you talking about?

CONSTANCE. It's a long story, Aunt Polly, and I must run upstairs and change my uniform.

MISS POLLY. But, child, what are we going to do with a band of marauding Yankees?

CONSTANCE. There will be nothing to do but feed them, make them comfortable and give them all the information we can —

MISS POLLY. All the information we can?

CONSTANCE. All we can — *invent.*

MISS POLLY [*vaguely*]. Oh. [*Perplexed.*] But why make them comfortable?

CONSTANCE. Because if we don't they'll make us uncomfortable.

MISS POLLY [*resignedly*]. I'm sure I don't know what is going to happen.

CONSTANCE [*going to her and kissing her*]. Now, Aunt Polly, don't worry one little bit: just leave it to me.

MISS POLLY. There's nothing else to do.

CONSTANCE. That's a good Aunt Polly.
[*Lucy Cress enters from lower L.*]

LUCY. I'm so glad you're back safe, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE. Thank you, Lucy. Will you run up to my room and help me dress? I'm in a great hurry.

LUCY. Why certainly, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE. I saw your father this morning.

LUCY. Oh, did you? How is Dad?

CONSTANCE. Very well. He's coming over to see you some day soon. [*As Lucy moves toward door at lower R.*] I'll be right up. [*Lucy exits at lower R.*] It was good of her to come over.

MISS POLLY. I don't know what I should do without her. [*General Pinckney and Judge Robinson enter from upper L. The General and Constance go quickly to one another.*]

GENERAL. Conny!

CONSTANCE. Oh, Pa! [*The General embraces her tenderly, stroking her hair.*] Did you think I was lost?

GENERAL [*in a broken voice*]. I didn't know, dear. I didn't know: I was afraid.

CONSTANCE [*smiling up at him*]. You never have any confidence in me, Pa. [*To the Judge.*] Has he, Judge?

JUDGE. He has more than I'd have, Constance.

GENERAL. What's this Bob tells me of your running into the Yankees?

CONSTANCE. I must hurry and dress now, Pa. I'll be right down and tell you all my adventures.

GENERAL. Don't be long.

CONSTANCE. I shan't. Do come along, Aunt Polly. I've got to talk to somebody.

MISS POLLY. I'll come in a minute.

CONSTANCE [*moving toward door at lower R.*]. Don't you and Anita run off, Judge.

JUDGE. No indeedy. [*Constance throws a kiss to her father and exits at lower R.*] Well, Randolph, what shall we do?

GENERAL. If I were twenty years younger, Tucker, we'd give them a reception.

JUDGE. No use trying to stand them off. They'd have the house down about your ears.

MISS POLLY. I'll have Jefferson put the silver in the cellar.

GENERAL. No use, Polly; if they're after silver they'll find it wherever it is. We've simply got to make the best of it.

JUDGE. Any papers or letters about, you don't want seen?

GENERAL. A few. Come into the library with me, Tucker, and I'll get rid of them.

JUDGE. Don't you worry now, Miss Polly. I don't reckon they'll do anything but eat you out of house and home. If you want to hide anything, I advise you to tuck away those barrels of flour.

MISS POLLY. I've heard that Yankees are not all thieves.

JUDGE. Oh, I believe there are some gentlemen among them.

GENERAL. It isn't safe to have any illusions about them. A Yankee is usually a —

MISS POLLY [*interrupting*]. What?

GENERAL [*as if he could say nothing worse*]. Just a Yankee.

JUDGE. So be prepared for the worst.

GENERAL. Tell the servants not to talk.

MISS POLLY. I'll see them now [*moving toward door at lower R.*] and then go up to Constance. [*Miss Polly exits at lower R.*]

JUDGE. I think I'd better go out and find Anita.

GENERAL [*moving toward door at upper R., followed by the Judge*]. Yes. I'll wait for you in the library. [*They exit at upper R. A moment after the door at upper L. opens quickly and Jefferson rushes in, his eyes wide with excitement.*]

JEFFERSON. Masr Pinckney, the Yankees —! [*He stops on seeing the room is empty. He goes to the window at back and looks out cautiously.*] The whole place is jes' filled with 'em! [*Continues to look for a moment, then limps over quickly to door at upper R. Hesitates for a moment with his hand on the knob, shakes his head, goes to door at lower R. and exits. A second after Major Dale and Captain Fraser, even more bespattered with mud than in the preceding act, enter at upper L.*]

DALE. I wonder where that old darky scuttled to?

FRASER. Gone to rouse the household.

DALE [*looking about the room*]. It certainly needs rousing, and I'm afraid we'll find old Pinckney something of a sleeping lion.

FRASER [*looking ruefully at his mud-caked boots*]. I wouldn't mind growling a little myself. What a ride!

DALE [*laughing*]. It was a hard one.

FRASER [*looking at him quizzically*]. Beg pardon, Major, did you say *hard?*

DALE. The irritating part of it is that I begin to think that Miss Lucy Cress back there with the Madonna-like head told us the truth about that hill road.

FRASER. She looked capable of it.

DALE [*half humorously, half seriously*]. Capable of it! Did you notice her eyes, her mouth, her hair: her whole, complete loveliness?

FRASER [*prosaically*]. She was a good-looking girl.

DALE. She was a vision of Truth, Fraser; and you and I, suspicious by nature as well as by occupation, were fools enough not to recognize it.

FRASER. The female figure representing Truth never quite appealed to me.

DALE. You're too inexperienced to know that Truth presents itself in strange guises.

FRASER [*smiling*]. I realize it's to be gotten at in round-about ways sometimes.

DALE. Even if they're pretty muddy, eh?

FRASER. Just so. We should have taken the other road.

DALE. Well, now we are here we must get at it. And we haven't any time to waste either.

FRASER. Shall we sleep the night here?

DALE. No. If there's any information to be had we can get it in a couple of hours.

FRASER. Men and horses will be ready for travelling again in that time.

DALE [*laughing*]. And we'll try the hill road on the way back.

FRASER. As a compliment to Miss Lucy Cress.

DALE. Exactly. I believe there is a very disagreeable daughter in the household here.

FRASER [*laughing*]. I'll leave her to you, Major.

DALE. I think I should prefer to deal with Lucy Cress. Rather charming name that, Fraser: Lucy.

FRASER. I didn't know you were so susceptible, Major.

DALE. Every man with imagination is susceptible. Why, that raw, awkward, little country girl back there, properly dressed and in other surroundings, would put many a grand dame to the blush.

FRASER [*laughing*]. She did make an impression.

DALE. I confess it freely. But come, we must investigate a little. [*They make a move toward R. The door opens at lower R. and Constance appears on the threshold. She is dressed in a gown of dark purple. The bodice is tight-fitting with velvet buttons down the front, having a lace collar pinned with a gold brooch, and lace cuffs, the skirt very plain and very full. Her hair, carefully and simply done, is arranged low in the back in the shape of a "bun" and is confined in a net. She stands looking at the two men for a moment as if in surprise. They mechanically remove their hats, and Dale gives a slight start as he takes in her face.*]

CONSTANCE [*coming into the room*]. I beg your pardon, are you waiting for anyone?

DALE [*staring at her intently*]. I don't believe we have been announced.

CONSTANCE. Oh, your troopers in the court-yard announced you some minutes ago. I am afraid there won't be many of my spring posies left.

DALE [*quickly, with deep concern*]. Are they trampling the flower-beds? I'll attend to that at once.

CONSTANCE. Thank you.

DALE [*to Fraser*]. Captain, tell the men to be careful of the gardens.

FRASER. Yes, sir. [*Starts as if to move toward door at upper L.*]

CONSTANCE. I will tell my father you are here. [*Moves toward door at upper R.*]

DALE. I — we — ah — don't wish to trouble you.

CONSTANCE. Oh, it is no trouble! [*She exits at upper R.*]

DALE [*his eyes gazing blankly for a moment at the door where she has passed out. He then turns quickly to Fraser*]. Is there anything the matter with you?

FRASER [*puzzled*]. Matter with me, Major? No, why?

DALE. Did you notice that girl — that young lady who was here a moment ago?

FRASER. Yes, a very pretty girl. Must be the disagreeable daughter you were speaking of.

DALE. Do you mean to say you didn't notice the resemblance — the extraordinary resemblance?

FRASER. To what?

DALE [*in disgust*]. To what, man! Why to the truth-telling young bacchante we saw early this morning back there in that mountain cabin.

FRASER [*smiling at his earnestness*]. To Lucy Cress? I'm afraid you're a little mixed, Major.

DALE. Mixed?

FRASER. A while ago you said she was like a madonna, now it's a bacchante.

DALE [*impatiently*]. Oh, figures of speech.

FRASER. No, figures of women: two different kinds.

DALE. You didn't see it?

FRASER. Well, they both have light hair.

DALE [*laughing*]. Then the trouble must be with me.

FRASER [*moving toward the door at upper L.*]. I guess the trouble is twenty miles back. There's no doubt we'll have to stop there on our return, eh, Major?

DALE [*smiling*]. Miss Cress said she was going to Richmond tomorrow.

FRASER [*his hand on the door*]. Well, on to Richmond, then.

DALE. That's what I say. Tell the men to be careful of the gardens, Fraser, and warn them not to cause any unnecessary annoyance.

FRASER. Very well, Major. [*Salutes and exits at upper L. Dale stands for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, then takes the geranium out of his button-hole, and reaching to an inner pocket brings out a worn little testament, puts the flowers between the leaves, and*

replaces the book in his pocket. He moves up to the window at back, and parting the curtains a little, looks out. A moment after the door at upper R. opens and Constance re-enters. Dale scrutinizes her intently during the ensuing scene.]

CONSTANCE. My father is out of the house somewhere. I have sent word that you are here. He will be back presently.

DALE. I wish to cause your household as little inconvenience as possible.

CONSTANCE. We will appreciate your consideration very much, as my father is not strong and the possession of our house by the enemy will, I fear, greatly disturb him.

DALE. I beg of you to feel no alarm; and even though we do come under the ban of that sinister word "enemy," for the time being; I trust you will have no reason to consider us as such.

CONSTANCE. I want to thank you for rescuing my flowers.

DALE. I am sorry they trampled your beds, but my men have had a tiresome march today and are careless.

CONSTANCE. Soldiers on a raid are hardly apt to stand on ceremony.

DALE [*gravely*]. More apt to stand on flower-beds; but I assure you my command is not on a raid, and we shall give you as little trouble as possible.

CONSTANCE [*naïvely, but with a touch of malice*]. I may tell my aunt, then, not to worry about the silver?

DALE [*annoyed*]. My dear young lady, we are not bandits.

CONSTANCE. I have understood that certain Northern officers had a fondness for spoons.

DALE [*stiffly*]. If that is so, I should describe them as uncertain. Our depredations shall be confined to your barn-yard, and I regret that it is necessary to force your hospitality even to that extent.

CONSTANCE. I have a pet game-cock I should like to have spared.

DALE. Show him to me and I'll have a guard detailed to watch over him. Not a tail-feather shall be touched.

CONSTANCE [*demurely*]. Thank you. And may I ask to whom we shall be indebted for all this courtesy?

DALE. We seem to have been preceded by a very desperate reputation. I am Major Dale of the Sixth, United States Cavalry, and I hope in some small way to convince you that the stars and stripes is an emblem that stands for something not altogether despicable.

CONSTANCE [*bitingly, though with a smile*]. Stripes are for criminals, I believe.

DALE [*quickly*]. And *bars*. [*Then as if sorry for the discourtesy of his retort.*] Oh, well, we share the stars in common.

[*Lucy enters from lower R. with Constance Pinckney's muddy riding skirt over her arm. As she is crossing the room, Dale's eyes fasten on the skirt.*]

DALE [*suddenly, to her*]. What's your name?

LUCY [*taken aback, confusedly*]. Lucy, sir.

DALE. Lucy! Lucy what?

CONSTANCE [*interposing quickly*]. She is Lucy Barnes, my maid.

DALE. Lucy Barnes? Oh.

CONSTANCE. That will do, Lucy.

LUCY. Yes'm. [*Moves toward door at lower L., Dale looking after her curiously.*]

DALE. Muddy riding skirt. [*Lucy exits at L. lower.*]

CONSTANCE [*glancing at his boots*]. Muddy boots.

DALE. The roads *are* bad.

CONSTANCE. So I found when I was out.

DALE [*quizzically*]. Perhaps you didn't ride on the river road.

CONSTANCE. No. Did you?

DALE. Unfortunately, yes; although I was advised not to.

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. It is easier to take a bad road than good advice.

DALE. That is a commonplace of experience. You ride much?

CONSTANCE. Yes.

DALE. At night?

CONSTANCE [*answering his look calmly*]. I prefer sunshine.

DALE [*half questioning*]. But one can't always choose the hour for one's going and coming.

CONSTANCE. You are at perfect liberty to choose yours.

DALE. I have my duty.

CONSTANCE. And you find that interferes with liberty.

DALE. Sometimes — with the liberty of others.

CONSTANCE. A pleasant exercise for it.
[*Jefferson enters from upper R.*]

JEFFERSON. Miss Constance, the General would like to see the officer gemman in de library, if he be so considerate. [*Constance looks at Dale.*]

DALE [*to Jefferson*]. Tell General Pinckney I will come at once.

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah. [*He exits at upper R. Fraser enters quickly from upper L.*]

FRASER [*saluting*]. Any further orders, Major?

DALE. I have decided to spend the night here, Captain. [*Constance smiles slightly.*]

FRASER. Yes, sir.

DALE. And Captain —

FRASER. Yes, sir.

DALE. See that no one enters or leaves the house without my permission. [*The smile fades away from Constance's face.*]

FRASER. Yes, sir. [*Salutes and exits at upper L.*]

CONSTANCE. You — you mean that we are prisoners?

DALE [*urbanely*]. That's what I mean.

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE. *The same as Act II. The curtains are drawn across the windows at back and lamps and candles are lighted. It is early in the evening four days after the time of the preceding act.*

AT RISE. *Miss Polly and Anita are discovered seated near the table.—Miss Polly industriously knitting as usual, and Anita busily engaged in tearing pieces of old linen into strips and rolling them up tightly for bandages.*

MISS POLLY. It must be nearly supper time.

ANITA [*laughing*]. I suppose we will be lucky to get any.

MISS POLLY. If we have to feed those Yankees much longer, I don't know what we'll do. They've been here three days now and there's no sign of their going.

ANITA. I don't think they'll be here much longer.

MISS POLLY. Why?

ANITA [*evasively*]. Oh, because I don't. They've been over every place for fifteen miles around, and there's nothing left to do. Ransacked our house yesterday.

MISS POLLY. Did they take anything?

ANITA. Nothing: there wasn't anything to take.

MISS POLLY. That's one of the things I hate about them.

ANITA. What?

MISS POLLY. They're not such a set of ruffians as I supposed they would be.

ANITA. I think I should like them better too, if they were more disagreeable. I was glad Pa got off to Richmond without any bother.

MISS POLLY. Yes. [*After a moment.*] Do you know, Anita, I can't understand why Constance has been so civil to them.

ANITA [*laughing*]. Well this is a civil war, you know, Miss Polly, so *toujours le politesse.*

MISS POLLY. Don't be trivial, dear.

ANITA. The General is better this evening, isn't he?

MISS POLLY. Yes, but he's still pretty miserable. It's their being here, that has worried him into bed.

ANITA. Is Constance with him?

MISS POLLY. Yes, she's been reading to him.

ANITA. She's a perfect marvel to me; I don't see how she does it.

MISS POLLY. What? Read to the General.

ANITA. No, talk to that Yankee, Major Dale. I should think her heart would pop right out of her mouth. I know mine fairly stands still whenever he's around. Why, I saw her out in the gardens with him yesterday.

MISS POLLY. It's just Providence he's never recognized her.

ANITA. He's not so smart as he thinks he is, maybe.

MISS POLLY. If they'll only leave us in peace.

ANITA. And not in pieces. [*Rising.*] There, I think I've rolled enough bandages for a regiment. Don't worry, Miss Polly, they might have been a good deal worse, and given you a heap more trouble. [*Constance enters at lower R.*] Oh, Constance.

MISS POLLY. I was just going up. How's your pa.

CONSTANCE. He's feeling more like himself this evening.

MISS POLLY [*puts her knitting in her bag and rises*]. I'll run up for a few minutes. Tell Jefferson to call me when supper is ready.

CONSTANCE. I will, Aunt Polly. [*Miss Polly exits at lower R.*]

ANITA [*as soon as the door closes behind Miss Polly, goes to Constance quickly*]. Isn't it perfectly splendid, dear!

CONSTANCE. What?

ANITA. That you've been able to keep them. Bob should surely be here some time tonight.

CONSTANCE [*looking after her without any exultation, rather queerly*]. You think so: so soon?

ANITA. There's no reason why not, unless they are detained. [*Noticing her preoccupied manner.*] What is it, honey? You look worried.

CONSTANCE. I am worried and as nervous as a cat. You didn't say anything to Aunt Polly?

ANITA. Not a word; though it was hard work to keep it in. Now don't you worry one little bit. Bob is

sure to get here, and then there'll be a sadder and a wiser lot of Yankees around.

CONSTANCE. I wouldn't have Aunt Polly know for anything.

ANITA. Why?

CONSTANCE. Oh, I don't want them bothered.

ANITA [*looking at her closely*]. That isn't the reason.

CONSTANCE. That's part of it.

ANITA. And the rest?

CONSTANCE [*with an effort*]. Well, if you will know, I don't want anything to happen.

ANITA [*in amazement*]. Don't want anything to happen!

CONSTANCE. I don't want Bob to come: I want these Yankees to clear out before he gets here.

ANITA. Are you in your right senses, child?

CONSTANCE. I don't know whether I am or not, but I've changed my mind.

ANITA. Constance Pinckney, what's come over you?

CONSTANCE. The whole horrible idea of just waiting for the trap to spring on that man, has come over me — and I hate it.

ANITA. But he walked into the trap?

CONSTANCE. That doesn't take away from its hatefulness: he's not a wild beast.

ANITA. No — only a Yankee.

CONSTANCE. But a human-being for all that.

ANITA. Well, I suppose he is: a kind of one.

CONSTANCE. You'd have thought so if you could have seen him yesterday, when Pa had that fainting spell.

ANITA. What did he do?

CONSTANCE. He picked Pa up so tenderly and carried him upstairs and laid him on his bed, and was so gentle and considerate, that I certainly shan't forget it.

ANITA. Oh, anyone would have done that.

CONSTANCE. It isn't what anyone would do: it's what *someone* does. Major Dale may be fighting on the wrong side, but he's fighting like a gentleman.

ANITA. I confess I'm not able to share your admiration.

CONSTANCE. I don't want to share it.

ANITA. Do you think he would be so magnanimous and considerate if he for a moment suspected who you are?

CONSTANCE [*in a low voice*]. I think he does suspect it.

ANITA [*in astonishment*]. What! You think he knows you were the girl he saw at Tom Cress's?

CONSTANCE. Sometimes I think he does, and sometimes I think he doesn't.

ANITA. Well, if he knows, why doesn't he say so, or do something?

CONSTANCE. How can I tell?

ANITA. But can't you see that if he has really recognized you, Bob's coming is the only thing that will save you?

CONSTANCE. All I see, is that if Bob gets here before they go, Bob may be killed.

ANITA. Bob — killed? I hadn't thought of that.

CONSTANCE. No, we don't think of those things beforehand. But would you and I forget, or forgive ourselves to our dying day, if anything happened to Bob? Isn't he beset by danger enough without our planning a new one for him?

ANITA. But what can we do now?

CONSTANCE. I have done something.

ANITA. You haven't betrayed Bob.

CONSTANCE. How dare you say that, Anita!

ANITA. I didn't mean that; of course I didn't mean that, dear, but —

CONSTANCE. I scribbled a note to Major Dale this afternoon, and told him there was danger if he stayed here longer.

ANITA. You signed it?

CONSTANCE. Just "A friend." He couldn't know whom it came from. I gave it to Jefferson and told him to see that it passed through three or four hands before it got to him.

ANITA. Did he get it?

CONSTANCE. So Jefferson said.

ANITA. But they haven't gone yet.

CONSTANCE [*moving to the window at back and drawing the curtains*]. No. I can see one of the sentries down there by the garden gate.

ANITA [*looking out over Constance's shoulder*]. Do you think they will go?

CONSTANCE. I don't know. If they don't — [*She pauses.*]

ANITA. What?

CONSTANCE. I'll get through and stop Bob.

ANITA. You can't get by the sentries.

CONSTANCE. There's no moon. I think I can. [*They turn back from the window.*] Oh, if Lucy hadn't blurted out that day.

ANITA. What?

CONSTANCE. You remember, I told you. Major Dale asked her what her name was, and before I could stop her out came "Lucy."

ANITA. But that was all?

CONSTANCE. That was enough, and with that muddy riding skirt of mine over her arm too. I could see his eyes fairly snapping.

ANITA. Perhaps you imagined it.

CONSTANCE. Maybe so. He has said nothing about it. [*Voices are heard off L.*] What's that?

[*At the same moment Captain Fraser and Tom Cress enter from upper L. Constance and Anita look at Cress in astonishment.*]

FRASER [*stiffly*]. Good evening, ladies. Is Major Dale here?

CONSTANCE. I haven't seen him. [*Going to Cress and shaking his hand.*] Why, Tom Cress, where on earth did you come from?

CRESS. Howdy, Miss Constance? Howdy, Miss Anita?

ANITA. How do you do, Tom?

CRESS [*to Constance*]. I reckon I'm a sort of a prisoner.

CONSTANCE [*looking from Cress to Fraser*]. A prisoner?

FRASER. Do you know this man?

CRESS. Sounds like a kinda foolish question, don't it?

CONSTANCE. Of course we know him. Why is he a prisoner?

FRASER. He is only under guard till he gives a satisfactory account of himself.

CONSTANCE. Satisfactory to whom?

FRASER. To Major Dale.

CONSTANCE. That is easily done.

FRASER. Perhaps.

CONSTANCE. I can vouch for him.

FRASER. Whether that will be sufficient is for Major Dale to decide.

CRESS. I seem to be a causin' considerable trouble, Miss Constance. I'm sorry.

CONSTANCE. It's not you, Tom, who are causing the trouble. It will be all right. [*Major Dale enters*

from lower L. He wears his hat, which he removes on seeing the girls, and carries some papers in his hand. Constance steps forward impulsively.] Oh, Major Dale!

DALE [*taking in the group quickly*]. Good evening, Miss Pinckney. [*To Fraser, inquiringly, looking at Cress and apparently not recognizing him.*] What is it, Captain?

CONSTANCE [*breaking in, almost angrily*]. This man here, Tom Cress, who all my family have known for years, has quite unwarrantably been placed under arrest.

DALE. How is this, Captain?

FRASER. It's hard to get anything definite out of him.

CRESS [*protesting*]. I ain't got nothing definite about me; ye kin search if you want.

FRASER. The guard stopped him as he was entering the house. You remember him, Major. His name's Cress.

CRESS. Tom Cress.

FRASER. We stopped at his hut back there on the river, on our way here.

DALE [*pretending to recall him*]. Oh, I do remember him now. Well, what are you doing so far from home at this time of night, my man?

CRESS [*meditatively*]. Wal —

FRASER [*very distinctly*]. He said he came to see his daughter. [*Anita and Constance can hardly restrain a start.*]

DALE. His daughter? The charming Lucy Cress who entertained us that morning?

FRASER. I suppose so.

CRESS [*elaborately*]. I beg your pardon. I said I was on my way to see my daughter.

DALE. I thought she was going to Richmond?

CRESS. Jes' so: to Richmond.

FRASER. This isn't the way to Richmond.

CRESS. There's more ways than one of gettin' to Richmond. You fellers ain't found that out yet, but it's so.

FRASER. I am convinced, Major, there's someone in the house he wants to see.

CRESS. I told ye three or four times I stopped to see ole General Pinckney.

CONSTANCE. He's one of my father's old soldiers, Major, and Pa will be delighted to see him.

CRESS. The General and I served a good many years together in the old army, Miss Constance. [*To Dale.*] When you was knee-high to a grass-hopper, sah; and I nevah thought I'd see the day when we'd both be prisoners together in the same house.

DALE. I think we can accept Cress's explanation, Captain. [*Constance can hardly conceal an exultant glance toward Fraser.*]

FRASER. I don't like to seem too persistent, Major, but I think there is a young woman in the house who can

throw more light on the subject of Cress's visit here than we have got.

CONSTANCE [*with an effort*]. Who do you mean?

FRASER. I mean the girl called Sally Barnes.

CRESS [*in surprise*]. Sally Barnes? Who on earth is Sally Barnes?

CONSTANCE [*catching his eye and holding it steadily*]. You remember Sally, Tom.

CRESS [*trying to cover up his break*]. Oh — You mean Sally?

CONSTANCE [*to Dale*]. Would you like to see her, Major?

DALE [*to Fraser*]. Do you think it necessary, Captain?

FRASER [*firmly*]. Yes, sir. I do.

CONSTANCE [*making a move toward the door at upper R.*]. I'll get her.

FRASER [*moving a step forward*]. Would it not be better, perhaps, Major, if Miss Pinckney did not get her.

DALE. You are right, Captain. [*To Constance.*] Where is the girl, Miss Pinckney?

CONSTANCE [*in a low voice, holding Dale's eyes, almost imploringly*]. I — I think you'll find her just across the hall, in the dining room.

FRASER [*moving forward*]. Shall I call her?

DALE [*moving toward the door at upper R.*]. I'll get her, Captain. [*He exits at upper R.*]

CRESS. I'm sorry, Miss Constance to be makin' sich a disturbance.

FRASER [*apologetically*]. I've tried to explain to Mr. Cress that he is really not a prisoner.

CRESS. That's like the feller who took the man's watch away from him, and then said he only wanted to pass the time.

CONSTANCE. I understand, Captain Fraser, that you have a peculiar interpretation of your duty.

FRASER. I am sorry that my sense of duty should interfere with Miss Pinckney's convenience.

[*Constance is about to reply when the door at upper R. opens and Lucy Cress, followed by Dale, enters. It is a strained moment and Constance and Anita try hard to conceal their anxiety, as it would seem as if nothing could prevent Lucy's instant recognition of her father.*]

DALE. Do you know this man?

LUCY. Yes, he's Tom Cress. Howdy, Tom.

CRESS. Howdy, Miss Sally.

DALE. I thought you told me the other day your name was Lucy?

LUCY. Sally Lucy. Some people call me Sally, some call me Lucy.

FRASER [*impatiently to Cress*]. Do you mean to tell me this girl is not your daughter, Lucy Cress?

CRESS [*scratches his head*]. Ef she is, I don't 'pear to recognize her.

DALE [*with a suppressed smile, to Fraser*]. She doesn't look to me like the girl we saw that morning, Captain.

FRASER [*with evident annoyance*]. You don't quite understand, Major, what I'm trying to get at. If you will allow me, I'll look into this a little further.

DALE [*urbanely*]. Certainly, Captain. [*Fraser turns to go.*] I'll be here for half an hour; I have some maps to look over.

FRASER [*saluting*]. Very well, sir. [*Exits at upper L.*]

CRESS [*to Dale*]. Kin I go an' see the General?

DALE. Certainly.

CRESS. Do I get my mule back?

DALE. He's at your service.

CRESS. I call that pretty decent.

CONSTANCE. Miss Anita will take you up to Pa, Tom. I wish to speak to Major Dale a moment.

ANITA. Yes. Come, Tom. [*They move to lower R. and exit.*]

LUCY. Do you want me any more?

CONSTANCE. Do you, Major Dale?

DALE. No, thank you. [*Lucy exits at upper R. After the door closes behind her, Constance and Dale stand silently for a moment.*]

CONSTANCE [*in a low voice*]. You know, then?

DALE. Yes, I know, but I don't see any particular reason for Captain Fraser's knowing.

CONSTANCE. You warned Lucy?

DALE. I only told her not to be too surprised if she should see her father.

CONSTANCE. Why have you done this?

DALE. Because I admire your courage and your loyalty to Virginia.

CONSTANCE. Any thanks of mine, Major Dale, will seem very slight, very trivial over against the consideration you have shown. What can I say, what can I do?

DALE. You can make something that I have to do easier for me.

CONSTANCE. What?

DALE. I am forced to ask you for your parole.

CONSTANCE. My parole!

DALE. Your word of honour, that as long as the war lasts, or until you are relieved, you will engage in no service against the United States.

CONSTANCE [*trying to control her emotion*]. Is that fair?

DALE. I think any one would say that it was a liberal construction of the rules of the game.

CONSTANCE [*almost defiantly*]. And if I should refuse?

DALE [*taken aback for a moment*]. If you should refuse? [*Then with calculated deliberation.*] Oh, then there would be nothing for me to do but to return to headquarters, surrender to my superior officer and ask to be tried for neglect of duty.

CONSTANCE. You would break your life, ruin your career!

DALE. Yes, rather than hurt you.

CONSTANCE [*impetuously*]. I — I can't accept that from you. I — I give my parole; I pledge my word of

honour. [*With a sob she puts her arm across her eyes to hide her tears.*]

DALE [*taking a step close to her*]. You must know that this is as hateful to me as it is painful to you.

CONSTANCE [*trying to recover herself*]. I — I don't mean to make it hard for you. After your consideration and courtesy to all of us here, that would be a poor requital.

DALE. You make too much of the very little I have done. It's I who have to thank you. You can't know what these past few days here at Pinckney Place have been to me. After three years of hard campaigning, the memory of the gentler things in life grows rather dim. You have made it glow again. [*With great feeling.*] I am a Virginian, you know, Miss Pinckney.

CONSTANCE. I know.

DALE. My people are all Virginians, too, and the fragrance of this old place has carried me back to them over in Fauquier County.

CONSTANCE. You've not been home for a long while?

DALE. Not since the war began. There's nobody there would care to see me much — except — except my mother. Mothers always want to see their boys, you know.

CONSTANCE. Your people are for the South?

DALE. Yes, all of them. But a man has to choose for himself, Miss Pinckney; a man's family can't decide for him.

CONSTANCE. No; a man must decide for himself.

DALE. I don't know why I tell you all this, save that I want you to know that the glimpse I've had of Pinckney Place these last few days is something I shall treasure always. The gardens, the beautiful old house, the courtly old gentleman, your father — and your own gracious self, seem to have brought me the long-ago time when I was a lad.

CONSTANCE. I understand, Major Dale, and I'm glad that the fragrance of our old place has brought pleasant memories to you, and shewn you that you still love Virginia.

DALE. There's no man in the world loves her more than I do. My father's grandfather helped to build up the old Dominion, and my grandfather helped with heart and hand to defend it and make it part of the nation.

CONSTANCE. And you are giving the best that is in you to crush it.

DALE. I'm trying to keep it part of the nation. Tradition means much to a soldier.

CONSTANCE. Soldiers have always destroyed traditions.

DALE. Bad ones.

CONSTANCE. Who is to judge?

DALE. Those who come after us: they'll judge.

CONSTANCE. And meanwhile?

DALE. Meanwhile, the struggle, the hatred and the suffering are for us.

CONSTANCE. You — you are going away tonight?

DALE. I expected to leave this afternoon, but —

CONSTANCE [*interrupting*]. What?

DALE. I received a communication that changed my plans.

CONSTANCE. A communication?

DALE. A note signed simply "a friend," which said there was danger in staying here longer.

CONSTANCE. Well?

DALE. Curiosity got the better of me. I decided to stay to see if my "friend" was well informed.

CONSTANCE [*realizing that she has defeated her own plans answers blankly*]. You — you would have gone, if you had not received that note?

DALE. Yes.

CONSTANCE [*trying to collect her thoughts*]. But why — why can't you go tonight — now? I have given my parole; there is nothing else. You have what you started out for.

DALE. I don't wonder you are anxious to see the last of us.

CONSTANCE. It — it worries my father.

DALE. Tomorrow you will be rid of us.

CONSTANCE. But why not tonight? I wish you would go tonight.

DALE [*puzzled at her persistence, and decided by it not to change his plans.*] It is impossible to get under way tonight, Miss Pinckney.

CONSTANCE. You — you won't?

DALE. I can't.

[*Jefferson enters from upper R.*]

JEFFERSON. 'Scuse me, Miss Constance, but supper am served.

CONSTANCE. Tell Miss Polly and Miss Anita, — they're upstairs.

JEFFERSON. I've told 'em, Miss Constance. They're awaitin' for you.

CONSTANCE. I'll come right away.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm. [*He exits at upper R.*]

DALE. I am sorry, Miss Pinckney, that I have to force your hospitality for another night; but men and horses have had a hard day, and there's another before them tomorrow.

CONSTANCE. If you can't go, you can't. I — I hoped you could. Good-bye. [*She puts out her hand.*]

DALE [*takes it eagerly*]. Shan't I see you again?

CONSTANCE. No.

DALE. Perhaps some other time — some happier time, when there is no shadow.

CONSTANCE. There will always be a shadow.

DALE. Never over my thought of you. [*They look into one another's eyes for an instant and see strange things there. She withdraws her hand and moves toward the door at upper R. quickly.*]

CONSTANCE [*pausing but an instant as she opens the door*]. Good-bye.

DALE. Good — [*The door closes after her and the "bye" is heard only by himself. He stands for a moment like one in a dream, then sits on the lounge near the table. He takes the little testament from his pocket, and from between the leaves draws the faded geranium and presses it to his lips. A moment after Fraser enters from upper L., and Dale quickly replaces the flower in the testament and puts it in his pocket.*]

DALE. Oh, Fraser. Anything new?

FRASER. Guess I was barking up the wrong tree. [*Sits down.*]

DALE [*smiling*]. If they are father and daughter, there must be a family coolness.

FRASER. But the resemblance of Miss Pinckney to Lucy Cress is still a mystery. Remember you spoke of it the afternoon we got here.

DALE [*carelessly*]. I do remember saying something of the sort; but I agreed with you afterward, that it was just a fancy.

FRASER. Well, I've been puzzling over it ever since.

DALE. You kept pretty quiet about it.

FRASER. I thought you'd laugh at me.

DALE. I am laughing at you.

FRASER. So when that old Cress turned up tonight with his mule, I tried to put two and two together.

DALE. But they wouldn't make four.

FRASER. No. I had accounted for everybody in the house but the girl, Sally Barnes, and she just fitted into my theory. I'm afraid I annoyed Miss Pinckney.

DALE. Fraser, you had the misfortune to be born in New England, and that annoys everybody. Your ancestors practiced the creed that to be happy you must make other people unhappy, and their descendants have been trying to regulate the universe by that principle ever since.

FRASER [*laughing*]. Well, we're getting it regulated.

DALE. You never can organize this part of it on any such plan. I know these people, Fraser; I'm one of them, and their tradition is just as strong as it is different from yours.

FRASER. What's the difference?

DALE. You believe in dying for your principles; they believe in living for theirs.

[*Jefferson enters from upper R., carrying a silver tray on which are a cut-glass decanter and two glasses. Dale looks around.*]

JEFFERSON [*coming to table and setting down the tray*]. Miss Constance has de honour to send you in a glass ob madeira, sah.

DALE. Why, I am very much obliged to Miss Pinckney, Jefferson. Please thank her and present my compliments.

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah. [*He lingers, watching Dale pour out the liquor.*] An' I want to tell you, sah, 't'ain't everyone has de privilege ob tastin' ole General's madeira.

DALE [*passing a glass to Fraser, who gulps it down, to the unconcealed disgust of Jefferson, who turns to Dale and watches him sipping it with approval*]. I appreciate the distinction that has been conferred upon me. [*Holding it up to the light.*] And by gad, Jefferson, it is a distinction.

JEFFERSON. I thought you'd recognize it, sah. Dere's mighty little ob it lef', I kin tell you.

DALE. There couldn't have been much like this in the beginning.

JEFFERSON. You'se quite correct. I remember puffectly when ole General's Pa laid it down for 'im. Dere was jes' ninety-eight bottles. "Dere," said old General's Pa, "ez long ez a man has wine like dat in his cellar, he's a gemman."

DALE [*laughing*]. I agree with him. It takes the quality to live up to wine like that.

JEFFERSON. Yes, sah: dat's what I allus sez. [*He moves toward door at upper R.*]

DALE. Don't forget. My compliments to Miss Pinckney and to General Pinckney too.

JEFFERSON. Oh, no, sah, I shan't fo'get. [*He exits at upper R.*]

FRASER. And so our little expedition ends in nothing.

DALE [*holding his glass to the light and smiling slightly*]. Do you call this nothing? My dear Fraser, no experience ever ends in nothing: there is always a net gain or loss.

FRASER. Well, we will put this one down to loss.

DALE. It isn't time to balance up yet.

FRASER. You're in command, Major; I'd be afraid to face the General when we get back if you weren't.

DALE. Do the men know we start at daylight?

FRASER [*rising*]. I'm just going to give orders.

DALE. I think I'll be able to give the General a satisfactory account of ourselves, and, confidentially, Captain, I think I may say that the night-rider will ride no more — at least at night.

FRASER. What do you mean?

[*There is a knock at the door upper L.*]

DALE. Who's that? [*Fraser moves to the door and opens it. A Sergeant stands in the door, near him Constance.*]

FRASER. What is it, Sergeant?

SERGEANT. Some one trying to pass the guard. I brought her in. [*He steps aside and Constance enters the room. She is dressed in a riding habit and carries a small whip but wears no hat. Dale gets quickly to his feet. Fraser looks curiously from her to Dale.*]

DALE [*as he sees her*]. Miss Pinckney! [*To the Sergeant*]. That will do, sergeant; thank you. [*The Seargeant salutes and withdraws.*] Captain Fraser, I should like to speak to Miss Pinckney alone.

FRASER. Yes, sir. [*Salutes and exits at upper R.*]

CONSTANCE [*with suppressed feeling*]. Why — why am I treated like this?

DALE. You were trying to pass the guard?

CONSTANCE. Yes.

DALE. Openly?

CONSTANCE. No.

DALE. They are under the strictest orders to let no one pass.

CONSTANCE. I must go — I tell you I must.

DALE. Why did you not ask me?

CONSTANCE. I ask you now.

DALE. I will go with you.

CONSTANCE. No.

DALE. I will provide an escort.

CONSTANCE. No — no: it is impossible. I must go alone.

DALE. Why?

CONSTANCE. I can't tell you.

DALE. Where?

CONSTANCE. I can't tell you. Let me go.

DALE. Good God, Miss Pinckney! You must see the hateful irony of my position.

CONSTANCE. What do you mean?

DALE. It's I am the prisoner, not you. I was sent out to pursue and I am the one who has been caught.

CONSTANCE. You! Caught!

DALE. Yes, caught — trapped. As I stood talking to you back there in Tom Cress's hut, that early morning, and watched the sunlight play through your hair, I thought you the loveliest creature I had ever seen, and I brought away a faded little geranium bloom as a memento of the vision. Then when I found you here in all the gracious, beautiful semblance of gentle-womanhood, my heart was snared.

CONSTANCE [*vehemently*]. Don't tell me these things; you have no right to tell me these things.

DALE. Every honest man has a right to tell a woman honestly that he loves her.

CONSTANCE. No man who wears that uniform, or fights under the flag you fight under, may tell me that.

DALE. It's the uniform your father wore; the flag he fought under.

CONSTANCE. Not against his own people.

DALE. For his country.

CONSTANCE. When his country was right.

DALE. I own to a larger allegiance.

CONSTANCE. I scorn any allegiance that's broader than one's conscience.

DALE. Does conscience hold you in no way responsible for the plight in which I find myself?

CONSTANCE. You came unasked on an enemy's errand.

DALE. Why have I stayed?

CONSTANCE. I'm not directing the movements of Yankee troops.

DALE. You know why? — to catch a glimpse of you once or twice a day, to see you smile, to hear your voice.

CONSTANCE. Am I to upbraid my conscience for that? Have you had no duty to perform?

DALE. It has been stifled by the witchery of your beauty.

CONSTANCE. You know that I've hated your being here.

DALE. And yet have tempted me to stay.

CONSTANCE. No, no, you know that isn't so.

DALE. You've been kind, when you might have been cold; generous and gracious when you might have been unkind. Is that no temptation to a man who for three years has known nothing but the rigour of camp and field?

CONSTANCE. If these three days have meant what you say they have, if you care as you say you do —

DALE [*eagerly*]. What — what?

CONSTANCE. Let me go — now!

DALE [*coming close to her, hardly able to restrain his feeling, speaking in a low tense voice*]. You are trying to save some one.

CONSTANCE. And if I am?

DALE. Some one you care for?

CONSTANCE. Yes.

DALE [*mechanically*]. Your parole?

CONSTANCE. Is sacred.

DALE. Then go!

[*At that moment a shot is heard off, then another, followed by a quick rattle of musketry and far-away shouts.*]

CONSTANCE [*in a hopeless, horror-stricken whisper*]. Too late!

DALE [*moving toward the window quickly*]. What's that!

CONSTANCE [*in a dull voice*]. They've come!

DALE [*tearing the curtains aside*]. They?

CONSTANCE. I warned you, I told you to go!

DALE [*facing her quickly, his eyes blazing*]. You — you knew this! [*He draws his pistol and moves over quickly toward door at upper L.*]

CONSTANCE. I — I told you to go! [*As he reaches the door.*] No — don't go that way. They'll kill you! [*At this moment Fraser, his face white, and begrimed with powder-smoke, bursts into the room through the window at back, a smoking revolver in his hand.*]

FRASER [*as Dale faces him*]. My God, Major! We're cut to pieces! Horses stampeded, not a man left! Save yourself if you can.

DALE. I'm with you, Fraser; we'll make a rush for it. [*Fraser turns and fires a shot through the window, at almost the same instant he throws up his arms, reels, catches the curtains and drags them down with him as he sprawls across the window-sill, dead. Another shot smashes the lamp on the table, leaving the room in a*

dimmer light. Dale bends over Fraser for an instant, then rises just as the door at upper L. bursts open and Bob Pinckney rushes in with a group of Confederate soldiers. Another three or four come in quickly through the window at back.]

BOB. Here he is! You're my prisoner, Major Dale! Surrender!

DALE [*glances from one group of soldiers to the other, grimly*]. Caught like a rat! I surrender. [*Hands his pistol to Bob. Constance, crouching on the sofa down right, gives a sobbing cry, and for the first time Bob notices her. He goes toward her.*]

BOB. I told you we would get here, Sis.

DALE. I congratulate Miss Pinckney on her strategy.

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE. *The gardens at Pinckney Place. At R., running from front, well back and at a slight angle, the exterior of a brick house. A door leads from the house to a short path at right angles, bordered by a low hedge and descending into the garden by two steps. A huge lilac bush in bloom at one side of this path just as it ends at the steps. This path breaks through a higher hedge of box that runs parallel with the house to front and back. At back another high hedge, broken at centre by a gateway with brick posts, which is overshadowed by another large lilac bush in bloom. Well down L.*

a large live-oak tree with spreading branches, surrounded by a seat. Under the tree a chintzed grandfather chair. Against the hedge well up R., a long seat. At back a hazy view of the hills and river.

AT RISE. *Jefferson is discovered coming out of the house carrying a small footstool. He limps over to L., and puts it down in front of the armchair, straightens the chair a little and turns as Constance comes from the house carrying a large cushion. She moves over to the arm-chair and places the cushion on it.*

JEFFERSON. I reckon a little sunshine and fresh air will do ole Marsr good.

CONSTANCE. Yes, Jeff, he stays indoors too much.

JEFFERSON. Dat's jes' what I tell him; but he don't seem to want to argufy the way he used to.

CONSTANCE. If he only would! But he just sits and broods and broods, thinking of Bob.

JEFFERSON. Now, honey, I tell you, you must stop a frettin' too. Don' you know dere ain't any harm kain't come to Masr Bob?

CONSTANCE. But it's weeks now since we've had any word.

JEFFERSON. I don't kere how long it is. Why on'y de las' time Masr Bob wuz home, I gave him my favorit' rabbit's foot; an' I tell you, honey, dere ain't magic enuf in de whole Yankee army to beat dat.

[*The gate at back pushes slowly open and a tattered, dust-covered Confederate soldier in gray looks into*

the garden and after a moment comes toward Constance and Jefferson.]

CONSTANCE [*smiling*]. I know your rabbits' feet are good magic, Jeff, but I can't help worrying.

JEFFERSON. Well, you'll see, honey.

[*Constance hears the step of the soldier behind and turns. At the same moment Miss Polly comes out of the house, with a heavy shawl over her arm.*]

THE SOLDIER [*touching his hat*]. 'Scuse me, Miss, but I'm powerful tired and hungry; do you think I could get a cup of water and something to eat?

CONSTANCE. Why, certainly, you can. [*To Jefferson.*] Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. Yes'm.

[*Miss Polly joins the group.*]

MISS POLLY. What is it, Constance?

CONSTANCE. A tired soldier who wants something to eat.

MISS POLLY [*to the soldier, a little suspiciously*]. A soldier?

THE SOLDIER. Yes'm.

MISS POLLY. From where?

THE SOLDIER. From Appomattox: the Army of Northern Virginia, ma'am.

MISS POLLY. But you're not wounded.

THE SOLDIER. No'm. I'm on parole.

CONSTANCE [*echoing his words*]. On parole?

MISS POLLY. A prisoner?

THE SOLDIER. Kind of a one. I'm goin' home. Haven't you heard?

CONSTANCE. Heard what?

THE SOLDIER [*trying to control his emotion*]. There ain't no army of Northern Virginia any more: it's scattered. We're all goin' home on parole.

MISS POLLY. Scattered?

CONSTANCE [*in a strained voice*]. On parole!

THE SOLDIER. It's — it's all over, ma'am. The Yankees are in Richmond.

CONSTANCE [*tries to keep back the tears, but suddenly flings herself in Miss Polly's arms*]. Oh, Aunt Polly! Aunt Polly!

THE SOLDIER. I wouldn't have said anything, ma'am, but I — I thought you must know: it happened a week ago.

CONSTANCE [*turning impetuously to him*]. I don't believe it!

MISS POLLY [*laying her hand on her arm soothingly*]. Constance, dear.

CONSTANCE. I tell you I don't believe it! Do you think General Lee would give in to a parcel of Yankees!

THE SOLDIER. It wa'n't no parcel, ma'am: it was five to one, an' more; if it had only been two to one against us, we'd a licked 'em. For six days we fought 'em to a stand-still, but it wa'n't no use. We had nothin' to eat, and for every man we lost they had

half a dozen fresh ones; so there was nothin' to do but quit.

[*General Pinckney's voice is heard calling from the house.*]

GENERAL PINCKNEY. Jefferson! Oh, Jefferson!

JEFFERSON [*who has stood motionless and wide-eyed, listening to the others, suddenly comes to*]. Yes, Masr, I'm a comin'.

CONSTANCE [*to Jefferson, as he moves toward the house*]. Not a word to Pa about this, Jefferson.

JEFFERSON. No'm, not a word.

CONSTANCE. I can't tell him, I can't, Aunt Polly. It will break his heart.

MISS POLLY. Just wait, dear: not now anyway. [*To the soldier.*] Come with me, I'll see that you get something to eat.

THE SOLDIER [*to Constance*]. We did our best, Miss.

CONSTANCE. I know you did: we've all done our best. [*She gives him her hand impulsively. He takes it quickly, and shakes it hard. Then turns and follows Miss Polly back, and off at upper R. Constance puts her handkerchief to her eyes and stands silently for a moment till she hears the General's and Jefferson's voices as they come out of the house, the General leaning on the old darky's arm. She turns quickly and goes to meet them up the path, then turns and walks with them to the armchair down R.*]

GENERAL. Jefferson is quite right, dear. The sunshine does feel good.

CONSTANCE. It's just what you need, Pa, dear.

JEFFERSON. I tole your Pa, honey, dat dere wa'n't no kind o' misery dat sunshine ain't good fur: whether it's in de legs, or de back, or in de heart.

GENERAL [*sitting in the chair and patting Constance's hand as she arranges the pillows behind him*]. Ah, Jeff, misery loves company; and that's what it needs.

JEFFERSON [*putting the shawl over his knees*]. Yas, dat's a mighty good remedy too. Is dere anything mo' I ken bring you now, Masr?

GENERAL. Nothing, Jeff, thank you. [*Jefferson ambles off and exits to house. To Constance.*] There, there, dear, I'm perfectly comfortable.

CONSTANCE [*sitting on the tree bench near him*]. But you're worrying, worrying your heart out about Bob, Pa.

GENERAL [*trying to be gay over it*]. I must admit I have just a little of what Jefferson calls "heart misery," but it's only because I'm anxious for news.

CONSTANCE. I'll ride over to the Robinsons' in the morning and see if there is any word from the Judge.

GENERAL. If there's ill news, it will travel fast enough: we'd best wait and not go in search for it.

CONSTANCE. No news is good news.

GENERAL. I fear we'll find it so. [*They sit for a few moments silently. Then he speaks with great feeling.*]

I couldn't give him up, Constance; he and you are all I've got. I couldn't bear to lose my boy, Bob.

CONSTANCE. He'll come home, Pa; I know he'll come home.

GENERAL. I — I want to think so, dear, but as the days go by and no word comes, I begin to be afraid.

CONSTANCE. If — if anything had happened, we — we certainly would have heard.

GENERAL. Something must have happened by this time, and it's the waiting, waiting, waiting to hear that is making me sick with dread.

CONSTANCE. Pa, dear, I know what it's been for you to sit here, while others have been doing the fighting; but —

GENERAL [*interrupting*]. There never was a time when Virginia needed a Pinckney, that there wasn't a Pinckney ready to serve her.

CONSTANCE. But you gave Bob.

GENERAL. Yes, I gave Bob — and — and I want him back, Constance.

CONSTANCE. He'll come back, Pa, I'm sure he'll come back.

GENERAL. He's the last of us, Constance, the last of the Pinckneys. I know it's wrong for me to want it so, and to pray for it so. Why should we be singled out for God's blessing, when there are so many who are waiting; so many who will never — never come back again?

CONSTANCE. Oh, Pa, do you think it's all been a horrible mistake?

GENERAL. A mistake? What?

CONSTANCE. The war.

GENERAL. No, no; a thousand times no. We have sacred principles at stake, sacred rights to defend, even though we perish.

CONSTANCE [*timidly, fearfully*]. But if — if they, the North, should win?

GENERAL. Then you and I should have to be very brave; the whole South would have to be braver than it's ever been on any battlefield.

CONSTANCE. We would be ruined?

GENERAL. No man or country can be ruined, that has kept Honour clear, and Faith unbroken. The Pinckneys have always fought for what they thought was right; for the King against Cromwell, for Virginia against the King, and for the South against the North.

[*There is the sound of voices off back. Constance looks around as Judge Robinson and Anita come through the gate at back.*]

CONSTANCE [*getting up quickly and going toward them*]. It's the Judge and Anita, Pa!

GENERAL [*getting slowly to his feet*]. Is it?

CONSTANCE [*taking Anita in her arms and kissing her*]. Oh, Anita! [*Taking the Judge's hand.*] I'm so glad you've come, Judge.

JUDGE. Thank you, dear. [*He moves down to the General and grasps his hand.*]

ANITA. Have you heard?

CONSTANCE. Is it so?

ANITA. Yes.

CONSTANCE [*looking instinctively toward the General*]. Pa doesn't know.

GENERAL. I've been expecting you every day, Tucker; at least some word from you.

JUDGE. It was impossible to get away, Randolph. Richmond has been in such an uproar for the last three weeks, that I simply had to stay to look after things.

GENERAL [*eagerly*]. Is the city safe?

JUDGE [*in surprise*]. Safe? Why — [*He hesitates as he glances toward Constance, who has come toward them with Anita.*] Why, haven't you heard?

GENERAL. We have heard nothing.

JUDGE. The city had to be evacuated. President Davis escaped, and the Yankees are now in possession.

GENERAL [*in a dazed sort of way*]. The Yankees have got Richmond?

JUDGE. Yes.

GENERAL. But surely it's only temporary; Lee can retake it?

JUDGE [*shifting his eyes from the General*'s]. No — no, I'm afraid it won't be possible, Randolph.

GENERAL. Why?

JUDGE. Because — [*He hesitates.*]

GENERAL. Because why?

JUDGE [*trying to gain time*]. Because the Yankees are in too great force.

GENERAL [*trying to control himself*]. You're keeping something from me, Tucker. What is it? Tell me.

JUDGE [*in a low voice*]. General Lee —

GENERAL. Not killed!

JUDGE. No; he surrendered the army of Northern Virginia a week ago.

GENERAL [*he seems stupefied for an instant; his fingers play nervously on the handle of his cane*]. Surrendered!

JUDGE. He was overwhelmed.

GENERAL. There's no hope, Tucker?

JUDGE [*grimly*]. None: we're beaten.

GENERAL [*dropping his head*]. It's God's will.

CONSTANCE [*with tears in her voice, lays her hand on his arm*]. Pa, dear!

GENERAL [*controlling his feeling with great difficulty*]. I'm all right, Conny. [*To the Judge.*] Tucker, did you see — hear any news of — of Bob?

JUDGE. There was the greatest difficulty in getting track of anybody: everything was in confusion — and

GENERAL. I can stand it, Tucker, if it's bad news.

JUDGE. I searched high and low through the hospitals, and among the different commands: Bob is missing.

GENERAL [*straightens himself with an effort*]. Missing? My boy, Bob — missing?

JUDGE. I could find no trace.

GENERAL [*he turns and starts to move toward the house, falters for a step or two, and the Judge steps quickly to his side*]. No, no, Tucker; just a little while — I — I want to be alone just a little while. [*He moves toward the house and as he passes up the path he mutters brokenly.*] Missing! [*Then exits to the house. Anita sinks on to the tree seat and bursts into tears. Constance moves over to her quickly.*]

CONSTANCE. There, dear, there: don't, don't cry. Bob will come back — he must come back. [*To the Judge.*] You think so, don't you, Judge?

JUDGE [*half-heartedly*]. Why, of course, dear. But it may be several weeks before we get word: everything is so tangled up.

ANITA. Oh, Pa, you know you don't think so: I've seen it in your face: You're afraid to — to tell me the truth.

CONSTANCE. You go in to Pa, Judge. You're the only one he'll want to see. I'll stay with Anita. We'll come in presently.

JUDGE. I will. [*Goes over to Anita.*] Now, Anita, don't, dear. You break your old daddy's heart.

ANITA [*controlling herself*]. I'm all right, Pa; you — you go.

JUDGE. That's a good girl. Both of you be as brave as you can. [*He moves off to the house and exits.*]

CONSTANCE. Don't cry, Anita, please don't. It doesn't help any.

ANITA. It — it helps me.

CONSTANCE. I want to cry too, dear — but I've — I've got to wait.

ANITA. There's nothing to wait for. It's hard to lose your brother, but — but it's harder I think to lose your lover.

CONSTANCE. Yes, it's hard to lose a lover. [*Getting up.*] Come, dear, we'll walk down to the pond-garden; just you and I alone, dear. It will do us both good. [*Anita rises and they walk up slowly arm in arm, Anita drying her eyes.*] You know Jefferson says he knows Bob will come home.

ANITA. What does he know?

CONSTANCE. He gave Bob his favorite rabbit's foot, and he's sure nothing could prevail against that.

ANITA [*with a ray of hope*]. You don't believe in rabbit's feet, do you, Constance?

CONSTANCE. Indeed I do. [*They exit at L.*]

[*A moment after the garden gate at back pushes open and Dale and Bob Pinckney enter. They are dust-covered and weary. Bob is pale and listless; one arm*

hangs in a dusty bandage. He leans heavily on Dale, who supports him tenderly.]

DALE. Here we are.

BOB. I — can't move another step, Dale; I'm done for.

DALE [*leading him to the bench under the hedge at R.*]. Rest here for a minute. Just think, we're here.

BOB [*raising his head listlessly*]. Where are we?

DALE. Why, don't you know? Is there another garden like this in all Virginia?

BOB [*eagerly*]. Not home?

DALE. Yes, home; at Pinckney Place.

BOB. I never thought I'd see it again; I never should if it hadn't been for you.

DALE. Oh, nonsense!

BOB. By God, Dale, I never can repay you for this.

DALE. Just wait there now, quietly, till I run up to the house. [*He moves up the path to the door and knocks with the brass knocker. Bob is hidden from view by the hedge and lilac bushes. A moment later the door opens and General Pinckney appears on the threshold.*]

GENERAL [*seeing the blue uniform, his manner freezes*]. Well, sir.

DALE. You have probably forgotten me, General Pinckney. I am Colonel Dale.

GENERAL [*starting slightly*]. You come at an inopportune moment, sir, to renew so slight an acquaintance as we have.

DALE [*taken back by the General's manner*]. But I came to —

GENERAL [*interrupting with great intensity*]. I know why you came; but the evil news has outstripped you, sir. Have you and yours not brought sorrow enough, without adding to the humiliation which the presence of any officer of your army would give us?

DALE [*overcome by the General's bitterness*]. You misunderstand, General; I —

GENERAL. It is you who misunderstand. We wish to be left alone with our grief. I should have expected a more delicate feeling in the matter from any gentleman.

DALE. I beg of you to listen to me, sir.

GENERAL. Listen to you, no! This is too much. I ask you to go, sir; to go at once.

DALE. General Pinckney, you don't understand. I have brought you —

GENERAL. Can you bring me back my boy — my boy, Bob?

[*Bob on the bench recognizes his father's voice and gets unsteadily to his feet, crying.*]

BOB. Father! [*He moves down toward the path.*]

GENERAL. What was that?

DALE. I have brought him back.

[*Bob comes down behind the hedge; the General goes quickly to him and takes him in his arms.*]

GENERAL. Bob! My boy!

BOB. Father!

GENERAL [*all aglow with pleasure and excitement*]. Bob! Oh, Bob, — I — I thought you were gone.

BOB. I was almost: Colonel Dale saved what was left of me.

GENERAL [*to Dale, in wonderment*]. It is you — you, sir, who have brought him back to us? I don't understand, Bob.

BOB. He has stood by me night and day, father; he pulled me through. [*He sinks on to the bench.*]

DALE. Captain Pinckney overestimates my service.

GENERAL. What am I to say to you, sir, for my unpardonable words? Can you forgive an old man's outburst?

DALE. Please, General, say nothing.

[*The Judge appears in the doorway and comes quickly down the path.*]

GENERAL [*hearing him, turns*]. Tucker! It's Bob: he's come back.

JUDGE [*coming down the steps to them*]. Why, Bob, my boy! [*Grasps his hand.*]

BOB. How are you, Judge?

GENERAL. We owe him to this gentleman, Tucker. [*Introducing them.*] Major Dale, Judge Robinson.

DALE [*taking the Judge's extended hand and raising his hat*]. I'm glad to meet you, sir.

JUDGE. It's an honour, sir. Of the army of Virginia, sir?

DALE [*embarrassed*]. No, I'm — that is —

GENERAL. Major Dale is —

BOB. Colonel Dale, father.

GENERAL. I beg your pardon, sir. Colonel Dale is in the Federal army, Tucker.

JUDGE [*in amazement*]. The Federal Army! A Yan — [*A look from the General stops him.*]

DALE. If you'll excuse me, General, I'll look to my horse.

GENERAL. The servants will attend to that, Colonel.

DALE. He's pretty well done; I'll just see to him myself and will rejoin you.

GENERAL. Very well. [*Dale exits at back.*]

THE JUDGE [*looking after him blankly*]. A Yankee! Well, I'll be damned!

BOB. He saved my life at Appomattox, Judge. When our corps tried to break through Sheridan's line, I was knocked over; think of the irony of it: the last fight.

JUDGE. But how did this Yankee — Dale —
[*At this moment Constance and Anita re-enter from L., see Bob, and rush to him.*]

CONSTANCE. Oh, Bob!

ANITA. Bob! [*They both kiss him.*]

GENERAL [*beaming*]. Careful.

BOB [*smiling*]. It does me good. I thought I was played out, but this gives me strength.

ANITA. How did you get here?

CONSTANCE. Where did you come from, Bob?

BOB [*smiling*]. An old friend of yours, Constance, brought me home — what there is left of me.

CONSTANCE. A friend of mine?

JUDGE. What do you mean?

ANITA. Who?

BOB. Remember Dale?

CONSTANCE [*eagerly*]. Not Major Dale!

BOB. Colonel Dale now.

CONSTANCE. Where is he?

GENERAL. He'll be here in a minute. He's putting up his horse.

ANITA. Tell us, Bob; tell us all about it.

BOB. I will in just a little while: I'm — I'm a little tired now.

GENERAL. Yes, yes, come, we'll go in. [*The Judge helps Bob to rise. The General puts his arm affectionately about him.*] But first, before Colonel Dale joins us, I want to say that I offered an affront to him here a few moments ago which it will take all the consideration and all the courtesy of yours and mine to atone for. I ask you all to help me make Colonel Dale feel that he is not an enemy but an honoured guest at Pinckney Place.

BOB. Thank you, father; that's like you.

[*The group moves up the path. Jefferson appears in the doorway and his eyes bulge on seeing Bob; then he comes down to him quickly, grinning.*]

JEFFERSON. Bress my soul ef it ain't Masr Bob.

BOB [*taking his hand*]. Helloa, Jeff.

JEFFERSON [*triumphantly to Constance*]. What did I tell ye, 'bout dat rabbit's foot, Miss Constance?

CONSTANCE. You certainly told me, Jeff.

JEFFERSON. An' here he is.

GENERAL. You run in, Jeff, and tell Miss Polly we're coming.

JEFFERSON. Yes, Masr. [*He turns back and exits to house.*]

CONSTANCE. Have you got it, Bob?

BOB. What?

CONSTANCE. The rabbit's foot?

BOB [*fumbling in his pocket and bringing it out*]. Of course: here it is.

CONSTANCE. Give it to me.

BOB [*handing it to her*]. What for?

CONSTANCE. Just for luck.

GENERAL [*as they all come to the door*]. Hadn't you better walk down to the gate and bring Colonel Dale in, Constance?

CONSTANCE. Yes, Pa.

GENERAL. Tell him we're all waiting for him.

CONSTANCE. I will.

[*They exit to the house. Constance turns and walks down the path slowly. She stops at the lilac bush for an instant and plucks a cluster of the purple blossoms. At this moment Dale re-enters from back, and moves along the hedge toward the path to the house. Just as she is at the top step, he comes to the path.*]

DALE [*taking off his hat*]. Miss Pinckney!

CONSTANCE. Colonel Dale! [*She puts out her hand; he takes it quickly.*] Pa asked me to bring you to the house. They've gone in.

DALE. You've seen your brother?

CONSTANCE. Yes, and what am I to say? Is it quite fair you should thrust such an obligation upon us — you of all men?

DALE. Is it quite fair that you should look on it that way?

CONSTANCE. Don't misunderstand me, please: I look on it in no way that is not very humble, very grateful. We all, at Pinckney Place, can never forget it.

DALE. If you knew how little credit I deserve.

CONSTANCE. Why?

DALE. I brought him back to you because I wanted to come.

CONSTANCE. Wanted to come — here?

DALE. As I never wanted to come to any place in the world before.

CONSTANCE. You have forgotten — forgiven that horrible night?

DALE. I remember nothing about that night except —

CONSTANCE. What?

DALE. Something you said.

CONSTANCE. What was it?

DALE. You told me you were trying to save some one you cared for.

CONSTANCE. Did I?

DALE. I have thought of that every day and every night since.

CONSTANCE. Why?

DALE. I wanted to know who it was. Tell me.

CONSTANCE [*her eyes dropping under his close scrutiny*]. My brother.

DALE. He didn't need saving.

CONSTANCE [*after a moment — with calculated irrelevance*]. Do you believe in a rabbit's foot?

DALE. Of course I do.

CONSTANCE. So do I.

DALE [*quietly persistent*]. What has that to do with what I want to know?

CONSTANCE. Nothing. [*There is silence for a moment between them. Then she looks at him as if she wanted to say the thing he would rather hear than anything, but instead she says in a low voice with a little smile.*] I've — I've kept my parole.

DALE [*bending toward her*]. Do you think, if I wait, you would feel like giving it back to me?

CONSTANCE. Perhaps.

DALE. You mean — !

CONSTANCE [*very gently*]. What you wish.

DALE [*quickly*]. Constance!

CONSTANCE [*in a low voice*]. Hadn't we better go in?
[*He kisses her hand, and they pass into the house.*]

CURTAIN

THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

NEW YORK: HENRY MILLER THEATRE

MANAGER: MR. HENRY MILLER

The Opening of the Theatre, April 1, 1918

CHARACTERS

GERALD PLACE, *a bachelor in the "forties,"* Henry Miller
JACK FORSYTHE . . . . . Robert Ames
LANGDON TRAIN, *a fashionable doctor,*
Frank Kemble Cooper
KENNETH GUILE, *a young playwright.* . L. Leslie Austen
CROCKETT, *Gerald Place's man-servant* . . Lewis Seeley
HARRISON HEALEY, *a Theatrical Manager,* Frank Sylvester
MRS. FORSYTHE . . . . . Lucile Watson
HILDA FORSYTHE, *her daughter* . Lillian Kemble Cooper
BETTY CRICHTON, *her secretary* . . . . . Olive Tell
MRS. LUPIN, *her friend* . . . . . Hilda Spong

The Scene is a living-room in the house of Mr. Gerald Place, New York. Before the Great War.

SCENARIO

ACT I

An ample, handsomely furnished living-room in a New York house, "East" of Fifth Avenue, before the Great War. Entrance at R. L. and B. A large fire-place at R.

TIME

ACT I. *Morning.*

ACT II. *Afternoon.*

ACT III. *Night.*

A week is supposed to elapse between Acts I and II, several weeks between Acts II and III.

ACT I

AT RISE. *Dr. Langdon Train enters at Back, ushered in by Crockett. Train is a man of forty-seven — but looking ten years older, — a successful, fashionable physician, with a forceful, decisive manner and a pleasant personality. Crockett, Gerald Place's servant, is a smart, discreet English servant of about thirty.*

TRAIN. Is Mr. Place in bed, Crockett?

CROCKETT. Oh, no, doctor.

TRAIN. Lying down?

CROCKETT. No, sir. I'll tell him you are here, sir.

TRAIN. But the telephone message said that he wanted me immediately.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir; Mr. Place wants everything immediately.

TRAIN [*looking at him sharply*]. Oh, does he! May I ask if Mr. Place is ill at all?

CROCKETT [*with the air of a consulting confrère*]. I should not exactly describe him as ill, doctor.

TRAIN [*drily*]. Not exactly, eh? Well, what would be your diagnosis?

CROCKETT. I should say, sir, as you ask me, that Mr. Place is perhaps a trifle low-spirited, sir.

TRAIN. Ha, liver, eh?

CROCKETT. I hardly think, sir, that the liver is the seat of the trouble.

TRAIN. No?

CROCKETT. I don't mean to say as Mr. Place hasn't, like the rest of us, sir, his bilious attacks, but his present complaint is blue, not yellow, sir, if I may say so, sir.

TRAIN. And can you think of any definite cause for his being one colour rather than another, Crockett?

CROCKETT. Well, sir, I think America weighs rather heavily on him, sir.

TRAIN. Let me see, he's been back just about two weeks.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. And a fortnight is a very long time for Mr. Place to stop anywhere. He says New York is not what it used to be, sir.

TRAIN. Nothing is, Crockett.

[*Gerald Place appears in doorway at R. back, and stands unnoticed, listening for a moment, with an amused look on his face.*]

CROCKETT. That's what I tell him, sir, but it doesn't seem to cheer him. If you were to ask me, sir, as has the opportunity of watching him closely, I'd say *that* is his real complaint.

TRAIN. What?

CROCKETT. That nothing is what it used to be.

TRAIN. It sounds serious, Crockett.

CROCKETT [*with concern*]. Really, sir?

TRAIN. Yes, it's incurable.

CROCKETT [*dubiously*]. And him such a young man too, in spite of his grey hairs.

PLACE [*Gerald Place is a man of forty-five with the easy charm and distinction of a man of breeding, cultivation and experience. He moves toward Crockett and Train, smiling good-humouredly*]. Whose grey hairs, Crockett?

CROCKETT [*in consternation*]. I *beg* pardon, sir.

TRAIN. My fault, Gerald; I was trying to find out from Crockett your particular Wednesday morning ailment.

PLACE. And he was betraying my infirmities.

CROCKETT. I'm sorry, sir, if I was indiscreet.

TRAIN. Grey hair isn't an infirmity.

PLACE. Ah, my dear Langdon, it is the outward and visible sign — [*Breaking off.*] That will do, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exit at back L.*]

TRAIN. Visible sign of what?

PLACE. Of the surrender of Youth.

TRAIN [*laughing*]. Nonsense! Grey hair is a badge of honour; token of wisdom, experience, judgment, and all that sort of thing.

PLACE. And what are wisdom, experience and judgment but the pitiless conquerors of Youth?

TRAIN. Come, let me look at your tongue.

PLACE. Better listen to it.

TRAIN. It sounds heavily coated.

PLACE [*laughing*]. Sit down, I want to talk to you. [*Train looks at his watch.*] No looking at watches. Twenty years ago neither of us cared about the time.

TRAIN [*sitting*]. Twenty years ago, my dear Gerald, we were both young.

PLACE [*laughing*]. So, youth *has* surrendered, eh?

TRAIN. Nothing of the kind; I'm busy.

PLACE. Youth is never busy.

TRAIN. Well, what about these loud and urgent cries for help over the telephone?

PLACE. First, what's your fee?

TRAIN [*humourously*]. That depends on the financial condition of the patient.

PLACE. I'm rich, Langdon; indecently so.

TRAIN. So you've been busy, too?

PLACE [*whimsically*]. Yes, I've been busy, too. "But what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world?"

TRAIN. Mislaid your soul during the process, eh?

PLACE. Isn't it always in the way when one's making money?

TRAIN. What you need is a parson, not a doctor.

PLACE. Parsons are obsolete, and doctors should be. All I want is a little friendly advice. [*Taking out his purse, he takes two gold pieces from it and pushes them*

across the table toward Train.] There's your fee in advance.

TRAIN [*laughing*]. Don't be a damned fool!

PLACE. There's danger of it; that's why I want the advice.

TRAIN. Do I know her?

PLACE. I never knew that you went in for the occult.

TRAIN. Nothing mysterious about that; the very simplest diagnosis.

PLACE. From what symptoms?

TRAIN. Obvious ones. In middle age a bachelor's fancy turns slightly toward someone who will love him.

PLACE [*mockingly*]. Inscrutable vision! My predicament pierced as with an X-ray!

TRAIN. Well, why don't you marry?

PLACE. My dear fellow, you *speak* as if it were as simple as taking a dose of your medicine.

TRAIN. A bachelor's analogy.

PLACE. I meant no discourtesy — to medicine.

TRAIN. What did you mean?

PLACE. I'm in a quandary, Langdon, and it terrifies me. I've set out on an adventure and frankly, on the very threshold of consummation, I falter.

TRAIN [*impatiently*]. At your age, an adventure — my dear Gerald —

PLACE. Sounds ridiculous, eh?

TRAIN. It is ridiculous.

PLACE. I think so myself. But wait till I tell you about it.

TRAIN. I have distinctly the impression of waiting.

PLACE. Impatience is a brutal form of unkindness to one in my condition.

TRAIN. I'll conceal it.

PLACE. How long is it since I've seen you — I mean not counting our dinner at the club the other night?

TRAIN. Five years — four anyhow. That autumn in London, when you had just gotten back from Borneo, Zanzibar, or somewhere.

PLACE. Yes, that was it, four years ago. And before that, how long?

TRAIN. Oh, a dozen years at least.

PLACE. More than that; it is just twenty since I've been in New York.

TRAIN. Gad, I can hardly realize it. How —

PLACE [*interrupting*]. Spare me the observation that time flies.

TRAIN. I was going to ask how you stood it.

PLACE. Stood it?

TRAIN. Being away from New York so long?

PLACE. I've been back only two weeks and I find that absence makes the heart grow fonder — of the absence.

TRAIN. What the deuce did you come over for if you don't like it?

PLACE. That's the one comic touch to my tragic adventure. I had to.

TRAIN. Business?

PLACE. Other people's, not mine.

TRAIN. But what's this adventure you are talking so much about?

PLACE. Oh, that began four years ago, just after I saw you in London. I had cashed in sixteen hard, detestable years of labour, exile, and privation. But I told you the whole story the other night; there's no use going over that horror again.

TRAIN. Most people wouldn't be so horrified at cleaning up a couple of million.

PLACE. There is such a thing as paying too dear for your whistle; I did for mine. Yes, when the fever of mere possession had died down and I began to count up the cost, I found I had paid too much.

TRAIN. What do you mean too much?

PLACE. Do you think a million or twenty million is enough pay for the loss of illusions, dreams, enthusiasms — everything that gives colour to life, flavour to it?

TRAIN [*sceptically*]. How did you lose 'em?

PLACE [*with feeling different from his usual tone of banter*]. Go out to the Straits Settlements for sixteen centuries — years, I mean. Bury yourself on a twenty-thousand-acre rubber plantation; wrap your soul in rubber; work with Malays, play with third-rate

Englishmen; and when you've come to screaming out at night, and almost gibbering by day, run over to Singapore for a holiday, and a few of Hell's delights! My God, Langdon, that's how I lost 'em. And I've been looking for them ever since.

TRAIN. Looking for them?

PLACE. Yes, for the last four years. That has been my great adventure.

TRAIN. And where do you expect to find them?

PLACE. In the fountain of Youth.

TRAIN [*laughing out*]. The fountain of youth! The perennial quest of fools, old and young.

PLACE. Scoff if it pleases you.

TRAIN. At fourteen it's a soda fountain; at twenty-four it wells up from the depths of a pair of blue eyes —

PLACE [*interrupting*]. "Drink to me only with thine eyes," eh?

TRAIN. Exactly. That's the nearest we get to it, and we only catch the spray then. At thirty-four it comes in a syphon — and we mix it with something that for the moment makes us think the goal is really reached.

PLACE [*smiling*]. And the next decade? You're getting near the dangerous age — mine.

TRAIN. At forty-four it's apt to bubble from a lithia tablet.

PLACE [*good-humouredly*]. Beast! Cynical beast!

TRAIN. Cynicism or not, it's the truth. Am I not high priest and guardian as it were of the sacred fountain?

PLACE [*laughingly*]. Guardian of the syphon! High priest of the lithia tablet! But I'll never stop till I find the real, right thing — and bathe in it.

TRAIN. As well hunt for perpetual motion, and it will take that to find the other.

PLACE. What if I were to tell you I'm on the track?

TRAIN. Here in New York?

PLACE. Yes.

TRAIN. I thought it was business that brought you.

PLACE. The obvious pretext. Business will never really take me anywhere again.

TRAIN. Tell me about it.

PLACE. Do you remember Tim Forsythe?

TRAIN. I remember him, yes; but I only knew him slightly.

PLACE. Well, when he died a couple of years ago, his will disclosed that in a moment of carelessness or mental aberration he had made me trustee and guardian for his two children.

TRAIN. Why?

PLACE. For some reason he had an exalted idea of my capacity as a man of affairs. I gave him a tip one time, when we chanced to meet in London, that came off very well.

TRAIN. One of those rubber tips?

PLACE. Exactly. Make a little money for a man and he places you on an altar; shower him with counsels of perfection, and he'll distrust you evermore.

TRAIN. Did he leave a wife?

PLACE. She was his most important legacy.

TRAIN. No money?

PLACE. Plenty of it, but Alicia Forsythe is one of those wonderful creatures who is beyond price.

TRAIN [*looking at him with a twinkle*]. Alicia, eh?

PLACE. Oh, I've known her ever since I was a youngster. We were old sweethearts. Always admired her. One of those feminine women, that are so rare these days; lovely, charming, with the full fragrance of irrational womanhood. [*Train nods his head with a little smile.*] She came over to Paris last winter and I must confess she gave me a thrill; and when she wrote me five or six weeks ago that she wanted to consult me about the children — why, I thought it was time for me to assume some of the active duties of my guardianship. They are a handful, I imagine.

TRAIN. So Mrs. Forsythe is the culmination of the high adventure?

PLACE. I'm wondering. That's what I've come over for: to see.

TRAIN. How are you going to find out?

PLACE. Oh, there are infallible tests.

TRAIN. When's a fountain not a fountain?—that's the question.

PLACE. Nine times out of ten, from my experience.

[*Crockett enters from Back with a card which he brings to Place. Train rises.*]

PLACE [*looking at card*]. In the drawing room, Crockett; I'll be disengaged presently.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exit at Back.*]

PLACE. I'm not half finished yet.

TRAIN. It must be concluded in our next. I'm due at the hospital in twenty minutes.

PLACE. Do you think I'm crazy?

TRAIN. No, I think you're lonesome.

PLACE. I *know* I'm lonesome.

TRAIN [*laughing*]. Oh, lonesomeness, what follies are committed in thy name! Bye-bye, see you soon again.

PLACE. Be prepared for another hurry call.

TRAIN [*going out at Back*]. If I get it I'll bring an ambulance.

[*Place stands at the door a moment smiling, then turns and walks to mantel-shelf at lower R., looks in the mirror, arranges his tie, then turns, and walking across to door at L., exits. After a moment he re-enters, talking with Mrs. Forsythe. She is a handsome, modish woman of forty,—clever, charming, capable, her worldliness partly concealed by good-humour.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. But aren't you delighted to see me?

PLACE. Delight is smothered in surprise. But I thought I was to dine with you tonight.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*sitting on the sofa near fireplace; he in a chair nearby*]. And so you are, but it was absolutely necessary for me to see you this afternoon, before you see the children. I am quite at my wits end about them. I didn't have a chance to tell you anything last night.

PLACE. The Ritz is hardly the best place for domestic confidences.

MRS. FORSYTHE. If you only knew what a relief it is for me to have some one to come to.

PLACE. If you only knew what it is for me to have some one to *come*.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*giving him a quick puzzled look*]. How charming of you, Gerald! It really seems to lighten my horrible predicament to have you so sympathetic.

PLACE. Jack and Hilda, eh?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Yes, they are getting absolutely beyond me. I can do nothing with them.

PLACE. Aren't they just a little on your nerves?

MRS. FORSYTHE. There are times when I could scream with vexation. Their persistence, their energy, their high assumptions.

PLACE. Youth will be served.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Yes, and wants to spread the table.

PLACE. You must let me take a hand.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I'm praying that you will. But it means firmness.

PLACE. I'm adamant.

MRS. FORSYTHE. They'll try cajolery.

PLACE. At their peril.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You have no idea of their charm.

PLACE. Haven't I? Their mother's has been a memory with me for twenty-five years.

MRS. FORSYTHE. My dear Gerald, do you realize you are talking of a quarter of a century?

PLACE. Do you know I've been dreaming for a quarter of a century?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*laughing*]. You're not such stuff as dreams are made of.

PLACE. No, but you are, Alicia.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*mockingly, but inwardly pleased*]. Oh, come now, you haven't been dreaming about me!

PLACE. Well, some one very like.

MRS. FORSYTHE. How like?

PLACE. The resemblance is extraordinary. Do you think I've forgotten that night when a broken-hearted youngster said "good-bye" to a slim, pale girl dressed in coral pink, all loveliness?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Was he really broken-hearted, was she all loveliness?

PLACE. So memory tells me.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Tricksy memory.

PLACE. Not mine; it never fails.

MRS. FORSYTHE. She gave him a flower.

PLACE. A rose. [*She shakes her head with a little smile.*] I mean a violet.

MRS. FORSYTHE. No, it was a sprig of mignonette.

PLACE. Of course — my favorite.

MRS. FORSYTHE. The memory is fragrant if it isn't accurate.

PLACE. Exactly. Why pin one down to a mere detail of botany?

MRS. FORSYTHE. "A rose under any other name would smell as sweet," eh?

PLACE. If it's called mignonette.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Ah, Gerald, those haunting, wistful old fragrances, — at times they've set me dreaming too.

PLACE. But I want to stop dreaming; for four years I've been searching for realities.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Are there any?

PLACE. You and I.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*laughing*]. The merest illusions. I, a slim girl in coral pink, you a brown-haired eager boy; we have both ceased to exist.

PLACE. Now, see here, I refuse to accept any such disembodied point of view.

MRS. FORSYTHE. No use to rebel, not to accept it.

PLACE. Let me prove that there is.

MRS. FORSYTHE. How?

PLACE. Oh, there are mysteries.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*laughing*]. Do you expect me to look through coral-pink spectacles?

PLACE [*gaily*]. Yes, and never to forget the odour of mignonette.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You're talking like a boy of twenty.

PLACE [*eagerly*]. Am I? Why won't you listen like a girl of nineteen?

MRS. FORSYTHE. How absurd, Gerald! That's just Hilda's age.

PLACE [*vaguely*]. Hilda?

MRS. FORSYTHE. And Jack's twenty-four.

PLACE. No, is he?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*nods her head*]. And what do you think? Both of them fancy themselves in love.

PLACE. What! Those children!

MRS. FORSYTHE. I don't wonder you're staggered. It's driving me frantic.

PLACE. Preposterous!

MRS. FORSYTHE. The precocity of the young people today is really a moral problem.

PLACE. What do they think they're in love with?

MRS. FORSYTHE. About a year ago a very presentable young fellow named Guile — Kenneth Guile — made his appearance in New York, and from their very first meeting, he and Hilda seemed to be infatuated.

PLACE. Well, if he's presentable, and a decent fellow — ?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, he's decent enough, but what — what do you think his occupation is?

PLACE. A chauffeur?

MRS. FORSYTHE. No, he doesn't even have to have a license; he's a writer.

PLACE. Oh, a quill-driver. What's he write?

MRS. FORSYTHE. You'd never guess — it's really tragic.

PLACE. Obituary notices, eh?

MRS. FORSYTHE. No: plays!

PLACE. Plays! I thought plays were produced; I didn't know they were written.

MRS. FORSYTHE. His are only written, they're not produced.

PLACE. What's to be done about it?

MRS. FORSYTHE. I've very weakly temporized with Hilda. She is such a relentless child, it was the only thing to do.

PLACE. How?

MRS. FORSYTHE. I finally consented to consider the possibility of their engagement when young Guile had one of his plays put on in a real theatre.

PLACE. That was an inspiration.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I'm not so sure; I have a haunting fear that he may be cleverer than I think.

PLACE. But the cleverer he is the less chance he has of getting his play done.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*doubtfully*]. Do you really think so?

PLACE. Go to the theatre any night and you'll find that out.

MRS. FORSYTHE. What a comfort you are!

PLACE. Sufficient unto the day is the drama thereof. We won't worry any further about this young playwright unless he proves duller than we hope for.

MRS. FORSYTHE. He's really brilliant at times, I must say that.

PLACE. Have no fear; he will have to print his plays. And now what about Jack; how has the great universal plague affected him?

MRS. FORSYTHE. My dear, that is a much more difficult matter to handle, much more, and so distressing that I'm actually putting on flesh. I always do when I'm perplexed and worried.

PLACE. But it's so becoming.

MRS. FORSYTHE. That's no compensation to a distracted mother.

PLACE. Who is this disturber of the peace?

MRS. FORSYTHE. For two years I've had living with me a Miss Crichton. She attends to everything that

goes to make life such a maddening thing: correspondence, servants, bills, flowers, invitations, and makes herself generally useful; filling up unexpected vacancies at dinner, and all that sort of thing. You understand.

PLACE. Sounds pretty good to me.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, she's invaluable.

PLACE. But not as a daughter-in-law.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You take such leaps.

PLACE. I have to, to keep up with your idea. What's the matter with her as a wife for Jack?

MRS. FORSYTHE. She's too clever.

PLACE. Is dullness a requisite?

MRS. FORSYTHE. There is a very charming medium. Frankly, I don't like her. Betty Crichton is too critical. She wants to analyse everything and everybody.

PLACE. Doesn't Jack come up to analysis?

MRS. FORSYTHE. You know very well that the modern young man doesn't compare to the modern young woman.

PLACE. I know she thinks so.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Well, the minute she thinks so, it is so.

PLACE. We must look after our Jacks, and preserve them from the Jilts.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, they'll come tumbling after just the same.

PLACE. Is Miss — a?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Crichton.

PLACE. Is she tumbling after?

MRS. FORSYTHE. She's too deep to show it, if she is.

PLACE. But Jack has broken his crown?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Fearfully, poor boy, and I know there would be no happiness in it for him.

PLACE. May I ask why you don't engage a new secretary?

MRS. FORSYTHE. *I'm* too deep for that.

PLACE. How do you mean?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Now, I have them both under my eye; send her away, and they would be spinning down to the City Hall for a marriage license.

PLACE. What's to prevent that at any time when the eye is removed, as at the present moment, for instance?

MRS. FORSYTHE. An excellent reason. You know by the provisions of poor Tim's will, that in six months' time Jack will come into a considerable fortune.

PLACE [*vaguely*]. Haven't I something to do with that?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Why of course you have; everything to do with it. As trustee according to the will, it is in your discretion to postpone paying Jack his legacy to any time within ten years.

PLACE. That would be a rotten thing to do.

MRS. FORSYTHE. But if he should marry against your judgment.

PLACE. Hang it all, Alicia, that's too big a responsibility to place on my judgment; I'm not his father.

MRS. FORSYTHE. That's just the beautiful point. Any man can be a father; only a few are fitted to be guardians.

PLACE. You think I'm eugenically sound as a guardian?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Perfect. Don't you see they will both be on their good behavior till the six months are up?

PLACE. And then?

MRS. FORSYTHE. If we play cards properly, there will be no "and then."

PLACE. It doesn't seem fair to play against a couple of youngsters.

MRS. FORSYTHE. But they are forcing the game on us.

PLACE. We hold all the honours, and call the trump.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Don't think that's any advantage against Betty Crichton.

PLACE [*laughing*]. She must have a winning way.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Judge for yourself tonight at dinner. [*Crockett appears at door Back. Place looks up inquiringly.*]

CROCKETT. A Mr. Forsythe to see you, sir.

MRS. FORSYTHE. It's Jack. He mustn't find me here.

PLACE. Tell him I'm engaged, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Just a moment. I think you had better see him, Gerald. Can you have him in another room till I go?

PLACE. Surely, in the library, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exit at Back.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE [*rising. With a quizzical look*]. I wonder if I can really trust you?

PLACE [*protestingly*]. What a thing to say to me!

MRS. FORSYTHE. But there's a romantic look in your eye that makes me afraid you might be very sympathetic to amorous young people.

PLACE [*eagerly*]. Do you really mean that: about the romantic look, in spite of these grey hairs?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*laughs as she looks at him critically through her lorgnette*]. Honestly, I hadn't noticed them. They only confirm my distrust.

PLACE. You think they indicate second childhood?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Let us say boyhood.

PLACE. The romantic age.

MRS. FORSYTHE. The sentimental age. It's too bad, Gerald, that you've preserved your figure.

PLACE. I don't know; I rather pride myself on it. Why?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Man's illusions never fade till he loses his waist-line.

PLACE. But don't you understand, dear lady, I'm striving desperately to hold on to my illusions, those that

are left, and that my one object in life is to regain those that have faded?

MRS. FORSYTHE. What a pathetic plight!

PLACE. Won't you help me?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*succumbing a little to his ardour*]. Well, I'll try to try. [*He takes her hand impulsively to his lips. Crockett enters from Back and coughs discreetly.*]

PLACE [*unabashed*]. What is it, Crockett?

CROCKETT. Might I speak to you a moment, sir.

PLACE [*to Mrs. F., who turns away*]. Pardon me.

[*He walks over to Crockett, who speaks to him in dumb show, indicating that someone else has called to see him. Place answers in dumb show, and indicates by a nod of the head that they are to wait in the room at L. Crockett exits at B. Place rejoins Mrs. F.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. Jack hasn't gone?

PLACE. Oh, no; he's waiting in there. [*Nodding toward R.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. I'll run off and let you two get acquainted. The poor boy must be getting impatient.

PLACE. Let him cool his heels for a while. I'm going down with you.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*moving toward back*]. There's no need for that.

PLACE [*following her*]. You don't realize it, but there is and I insist.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*smiling*]. Oh, very well!

[*They pass out at Back. A moment after the door at*

L. opens and Crockett appears. He holds the door open and speaks into the other room.]

CROCKETT. If you will wait in here, Miss Forsythe, Mr. Place will be back in a few minutes.

[*Hilda Forsythe, a fresh handsome girl, and Betty Crichton, a beautiful young woman of six or seven and twenty, enter.*]

HILDA. Thank you. [*Crockett bows and exits at Back.*]

BETTY [*gaily, but with a trace of nervousness, as she looks with curiosity about the room*]. Well, we've bearded the old tiger in his den.

HILDA. Betty, I'm just a little nervous, aren't you?

BETTY. He can't do anything more than eat us alive.

HILDA. But even that's unpleasant.

BETTY. It's your only chance, Hilda, to get at him before your mother poisons his mind.

HILDA [*a little hopelessly*]. Oh, I know his mind is poisoned already. All guardians have poisoned minds.

BETTY. It's up to us, then, to give him a nice clean new one. We'll change his mind for him.

HILDA. Mama will be furious.

BETTY. She's furious anyway. Now, I tell you what you do. Jump into the taxi and bring Kenneth here.

HILDA. Now?

BETTY. Now.

HILDA. Do you think it's best?

BETTY. Yes, let's get it over with.

HILDA. How about you?

BETTY. By the time you get back I'll have him tamed, or the lady will be inside the tiger. It just depends on what kind of an old brute he is.

HILDA. I hate to put it all on you.

BETTY [*kissing her, and smiling*]. Hurry back, then, to the rescue. [*As Hilda moves to door at Back.*] And don't forget the manuscript of the play.

HILDA [*at door*]. I shan't. I wonder if I can find my way out.

BETTY. Right along the hall to the left. [*She blows a kiss to Hilda, who exits at back. Jack Forsythe appears in the doorway at R. He is a keen, self-appreciative, smartly dressed young man, with an assured manner and a wisdom beyond his years.*]

JACK [*looking at Betty wonderingly*]. Helloa!

BETTY [*turning toward him quickly*]. Jack Forsythe!

JACK [*coming toward her*]. What are you doing here?

BETTY. I imagine we are both on the same errand—calling on Mr. Place.

JACK. Have you seen him?

BETTY. No, have you?

JACK [*shakes his head*]. I've been twiddling my thumbs in there for the last half hour and I heard your voices in here.

BETTY. Well, I've got to see him first.

JACK. What about?

BETTY. Well, if you must know — about Hilda.

JACK. I don't want to pry or interfere, but I wish you took as much interest in my affairs as you do in hers.

BETTY. I do take an interest in your affairs.

JACK. Why won't you marry me?

BETTY. There are so many reasons, I can't remember them all.

JACK [*with faint sarcasm*]. Oh, I know, the same old stuff: too young, too idle, too poor.

BETTY [*smiling*]. On the contrary: too old for your years, too busy — about unimportant things, too rich — in prospect.

JACK. Anything else?

BETTY. Well, I don't love you — I never can love you.

JACK [*close to her, taking her by the wrist rather roughly*]. You don't care for anyone else, do you?

BETTY [*drawing away from him impatiently*]. Don't do that; I don't like it.

JACK. I didn't mean to be rude. But do you?

BETTY. No, I don't.

JACK. Honestly?

BETTY. Honestly. How absurd you are!

JACK. Well, there are still some girls nowadays who do fall in love.

BETTY. Their state is the less gracious.

JACK. I'll make you, yet.

BETTY. I've told you "no," Jack, and I mean "no." So let's make up our mind to be just good friends.

JACK [*impatiently*]. Oh, that friendly talk makes me tired.

BETTY. Will you please run along now? I ask it as a favour.

JACK. I don't see why you are so keen about Hilda and Kenneth Guile.

BETTY. Because I care for her and admire him. I want to help them.

JACK. Mother will never stand for it.

BETTY. Well, I can't help that; I feel I'm doing the right thing.

JACK. I wish you'd feel like doing the right thing by me. [*Place enters from Back.*]

PLACE [*looking from one to the other as he comes toward them pleasantly*]. I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, but I had a little errand. [*Puts out his hand to Betty cordially.*] So this is Hilda.

BETTY. No, this isn't Hilda. I'm Miss Crichton.

PLACE. Oh, I'm very glad to meet Miss Crichton. [*Turning to Jack.*] There's no mistake about this being Jack Forsythe, is there?

JACK. No, I'm Jack.

PLACE [*shaking hands*]. I thought so; you look like your father. [*Moves over to R. and presses a button.*]

And now some tea, and then we can visit comfortably.

JACK [*looking at Betty*]. I'm afraid I have to go — an engagement.

PLACE. That's too bad; all my fault.

JACK. Might I run in tomorrow?

PLACE. Of course. We've lots of things to talk over. [*To Betty.*] Don't tell me you're not going to have a cup of tea?

BETTY. I should love it; I'm waiting for Hilda.

PLACE. Splendid.

JACK. Tomorrow then.

PLACE. Yes, you'll catch me just about this time. Sorry to have kept you waiting.

JACK. Oh, that's all right. Good-bye. [*He bows to Betty and moves to door at Back, followed by Place.*]

PLACE. I'm dining at your house tonight, I may see you.

JACK [*shakes hands*]. Yes.

[*He exits at Back. Place moves down to Betty, who is standing near the fire-place.*]

PLACE [*suddenly conscious that he's talking to a very beautiful and very interesting young woman*]. Do you know, this is really delightful! I've been away from New York for so long that I expected to find nothing but old ghosts hovering about. But I find myself making charming new acquaintances at every turn.

BETTY. I'm glad I'm not an old ghost.

PLACE [*genially*]. So am I, for it's so nice to have you one of the charming new acquaintances.

BETTY. Of course you're wondering why I am here.

PLACE. No, just enchanted at the happy chance.

BETTY. Mrs. Forsythe has told you nothing?

PLACE. She has told me everything. You see I've been placed in the quaint position of guardian to Jack and Hilda.

BETTY. Why quaint?

PLACE. I need a guardian; I've no right to be one.

[*Crockett enters from R. with a tray on which are all the accessories for tea. Place draws a small table forward, on which Crockett places the tray and then exits at R.*]

BETTY [*coolly*]. Of course, if you understand your own limitations, it simplifies things greatly, doesn't it?

PLACE [*looking at her sharply for an instant, to see if she's making fun of him*]. Yes — yes, indeed it does. You'll pour the tea, will you not?

BETTY. Yes, if you wish. [*She busies herself deftly.*]

PLACE. I really need some expert advice on guardianship.

BETTY. Why not let me supply it? One lump?

PLACE. Two, please. What are your qualifications? [*Taking the cup which she passes to him.*] You will pardon the necessity of asking?

BETTY. Oh, yes, I realize that our acquaintance has been but a matter of minutes.

PLACE. That sort of thing doesn't last long.

BETTY. What sort of thing?

PLACE. Minutes.

BETTY. Oh, I thought you meant guardianship.

PLACE. That too.

BETTY. Would you be willing to surrender it?

PLACE. To you?

BETTY. Oh no, to a very capable young man.

PLACE. Why shouldn't the very capable young man speak for himself?

BETTY. He has a certain timidity.

PLACE. Is that why he ran away?

BETTY [*puzzled*]. Ran away from where?

PLACE. From here.

BETTY. You mean — ?

PLACE. Jack Forsythe.

BETTY [*laughing*]. Oh, dear me! Timidity is not one of his virtues.

PLACE. Of whom then are you talking?

BETTY. Of Kenneth Guile.

PLACE. Oh, Hilda's friend: the young dramatist.

BETTY. Yes. You've heard of him?

PLACE. Of course I've heard of him. So you are by way of being Hilda's ambassadress?

BETTY. Isn't that rather a high designation?

PLACE. Well, I look upon myself as a first-class power.

BETTY. I suppose the fact that I am here is an admission of that.

PLACE. But I understand that a treaty has already been made with Hilda and the young gentleman.

BETTY. That is just the point; we want you to make the treaty valid.

PLACE. Let me see. When Mr. Guile has a play produced, he is to be recognized as a suitor in good standing. Is that it?

BETTY. He's a suitor in good standing now.

PLACE. But with not much to stand on, eh?

BETTY. As Disraeli said, every man with brains stands on his head.

PLACE [*smiling*]. A difficult position to maintain continuously.

BETTY. Oh, even a man of brains should turkey-trot occasionally.

PLACE. Some use for feet then. Do you know, I've found you've really got to have them, if you want to get anywhere.

BETTY. Kenneth Guile does want to get somewhere, so does Hilda.

PLACE. What can I do?

BETTY. Help produce Kenneth Guile's play.

PLACE [*getting up in amused amazement*]. Produce a play! You might just as well ask me to climb out on the roof of the Woolworth building and gild the weather-vane.

BETTY. It does come high, I admit.

PLACE. But my dear Miss Crichton, I know nothing about the theatre.

BETTY. Kenneth Guile does, and he's written a wonderful play.

PLACE. Why doesn't one of the theatrical managers produce it?

BETTY. Because it's a wonderful play.

PLACE. You are very enthusiastic.

BETTY. I am. I love the theatre; don't you, doesn't everyone?

PLACE. I used to when I was — [*He hesitates.*]

BETTY. Please don't say when you were "young."

PLACE. I came pretty near it. Why not?

BETTY. It is such a humiliating confession. It implies the loss of so much.

PLACE. For instance.

BETTY. Oh, enthusiasms, illusions.

PLACE. But once gone, can you suggest any way of regaining them?

BETTY. Perhaps you have only mislaid them.

PLACE. Perhaps; I'm very careless.

BETTY. You admitted you were fond of the theatre when —

PLACE [*shakes his finger at her warningly*]. Careful.

BETTY. Well, when you were not so old as you are now.

PLACE. We'll compromise on that.

BETTY. Didn't you?

PLACE. I used to be crazy about the theatre. Why, when I was a boy, night after night, I would hang over the rail of the peanut gallery, lost in another world. Such a procession: Lester Wallack, Florence, Jefferson, old Gilbert, Mary Anderson, Mojeska, Boucicault, Ada Rehan, and above them all Booth. Ah, those were magic nights!

BETTY. They must have been. And you remember all those?

PLACE. Perfectly, and a throng of others. I can recollect, as the littlest of shavers, what is still like a lovely vision — Adelaide Neilson as Viola.

BETTY. Can you really? I remember when I was a little girl, seeing Rosina Vokes.

PLACE [*laughing*]. Do you? Wasn't she immense! [*Breaks into song.*] "His heart was true to Poll, his heart was true to Poll, and no matter what you do, if your heart be true; and his heart was true to Poll." [*The door at back opens and Crockett ushers in Hilda and Kenneth Guile, just as Place is starting to give an imitation of Rosina Vokes, dancing and singing another verse of "His heart was true to Poll." Hilda*

and Guile look at him in astonishment, and Crockett has difficulty in maintaining his dignity as he announces.]

CROCKETT. Miss Forsythe, Mr. Guile.

PLACE [*whose back is to the door, wheels about, smiling*]. Is this Hilda?

HILDA. This is Hilda.

PLACE [*goes to her, takes both her hands*]. You have just missed it. I was engaged in giving Miss Crichton a song and dance. [*Turning to Guile.*] How are you, Mr. Guile? I am glad to see you.

GUILE [*a well-poised, intelligent young fellow of seven and twenty. He is smartly dressed, and well-bred in manner and carries a rolled MSS. under his arm*]. How d'ye do?

[*Crockett moves over to the table, picks up the tray, and exits at R.*]

PLACE [*genially*]. Here we all are now; let's have a party. Sit here Hilda. Draw up a chair, Guile. [*They all sit about the tea-table.*]

HILDA [*demurely, reassured by Place's good-humour and kindliness*]. How about the song and dance?

PLACE. Oh, I expect you and Guile to give me that.

BETTY [*slyly*]. I think you ought to know that Hilda stands rather in awe of her guardian.

PLACE. What?

HILDA. They are formidable creatures, don't you think?

PLACE [*scowling heavily*]. Is that your idea?

HILDA. Yes, something like that.

PLACE [*laughing*]. Impossible! That is not my conception of the part. [*To Guile.*] Speaking of parts, I hear you have written a play.

BETTY. That is not his distinction; everyone has written a play.

HILDA. His is a *good* play.

PLACE. How about that?

GUILE [*smiling*]. I am forced to admit, it is a good play.

PLACE. But what does one do when one writes a play?

GUILE. One usually writes another.

HILDA. One struggles to get it produced.

PLACE [*to Guile*]. Have you?

GUILE. Have I! Shades of Sisyphus!

PLACE. What's the trouble?

BETTY. Trouble? Why, the creatures can only read words of one syllable!

PLACE. Do the audiences understand any better?

BETTY. They should at least be given a chance.

HILDA [*boldly*]. We want you to give it to them.

PLACE [*aghast*]. I! How do you mean?

HILDA. We want you to produce the play.

PLACE. But, my dear Hilda, you might as well ask me to produce the egg of the Great Auk.

GUILE. Oh, no, it's far simpler than that, Mr. Place.

HILDA. Oh, yes, far simpler.

BETTY. We have the whole scheme perfectly worked out.

PLACE. Oh, have you?

HILDA. Perfectly. You tell him, Kenneth.

KENNETH. Well, Harrison Healey, who has the Fortune Theatre, will put my piece on, if I can find some one to pay the bills.

PLACE [*drily*]. There is a certain condescension about that.

HILDA [*impatiently*]. Oh, Kenneth, you put it so crudely!

GUILE. That's the whole thing in a nut-shell.

HILDA [*to Place*]. But don't you realize what a wonderful investment it would be?

PLACE. Frankly, I can't.

BETTY [*eagerly*]. But can't you see what a lot of fun you would have?

PLACE [*looking at her*]. Fun? But at my time of —

BETTY [*with a little smile*]. What?

PLACE [*confusedly*]. I mean for a man of my —

BETTY. Your what?

PLACE [*rising and laughing nervously*]. See here, it is so long since I have been entirely surrounded by young people that I am in danger of losing my head.

BETTY. How long is it since you last lost your head?

PLACE. Not since I was a —

BETTY. Careful.

HILDA. But you will read the play?

PLACE. Read it? I wouldn't know what it was about if I did read it.

BETTY. Of course you wouldn't; you would have to see it.

PLACE [*to Guile*]. What is it about? What do you call it?

GUILE. I call it the "Fountain of Youth."

PLACE [*staring at him*]. The Fountain of Youth? What do you know about the Fountain of Youth?

GUILE [*smiling*]. I wrote it.

BETTY. Please read it.

PLACE [*catching her eye*]. Of course I'll read it. Where is it?

GUILE [*handing him the MSS.*]. Don't let it bore you.

BETTY. That's the test.

PLACE. For whom?

BETTY. For both of you. And now we have taken enough of your time and will run along.

PLACE. Oh, no.

HILDA. We must.

PLACE. But you will all come soon again?

HILDA. Of course.

PLACE [*to Betty*]. But I mean very soon.

BETTY. Tomorrow maybe, to get your report.

PLACE [*to Guile*]. I'll bathe in it tonight.

GUILE. Beware, it's a magic fountain.

PLACE. I've been looking for it. [*They move toward door at Back.*] Tomorrow without fail.

HILDA. Without fail.

BETTY. Good-bye.

PLACE. Good-bye.

GUILE. Good-bye.

PLACE. Good-bye. [*They exit back. Place turns back and walks over to the fire-place, turns the pages of the MSS., reads aloud.*] The Fountain of Youth, a comedy in three acts by Kenneth Guile. [*Crockett enters at R., comes down and picks up tray.*] Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir.

PLACE. I think I am going to make an ass of myself.

CROCKETT. Very good, sir.

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. *The same as Act I.*

TIME. *A week later: afternoon.*

AT RISE. *Mrs. Forsythe and Mrs. Lupin discovered. Mrs. Lupin is a friend and contemporary of Mrs. Forsythe's. Both are smartly dressed, and wear their hats, but have removed their coats and furs. They are seated down R. near a small table on which are tea things, each one smoking a cigarette.*

MRS. LUPIN. Doesn't it strike you, Alicia dear, that we are making ourselves rather at home in the absence of Mr. Place?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*smiling*]. Well, isn't it woman's place to be at home?

MRS. LUPIN. I have never even met the creature!

MRS. FORSYTHE. The fact that he is guardian of my children confers some privileges, doesn't it?

MRS. LUPIN. But he isn't guardian of my children.

MRS. FORSYTHE. My dear, you should engage him if it's a possible thing! I haven't had such a heavenly experience since they were babies and their governess took 'em entirely off my hands.

MRS. LUPIN. Why not secure him permanently?

MRS. FORSYTHE. He pleads and entreats so, that I am in daily fear that I shall.

MRS. LUPIN. Why not regularize his position?

MRS. FORSYTHE. But that involves me! I don't want a custodian — and besides —

MRS. LUPIN. Besides what?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, he is so incurably romantic! He has been off there in the East Indies so long extracting rubber from bull-rushes that he is completely unconscious of the revolution that has taken place. He still thinks of women in terms of charm, loveliness and general ineptitude. Maddening, my dear, simply maddening!

MRS. LUPIN. A relic of the sand-stone period.

MRS. FORSYTHE. A relic of the brown-stone period. Perfectly capable of enforcing all the old, outworn theories about man being the head of the family, woman's sphere, the difference of the sexes: the old, old nonsense. And yet most fascinating and delightful.

MRS. LUPIN. A dangerous survival.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Exactly. Mere unmitigated male: conventional, brutal, alluring.

MRS. LUPIN. Can you keep him in his place?

MRS. FORSYTHE. I can if I can decide where his place is to be.

MRS. LUPIN. But aren't you afraid of his influence on the children?

MRS. FORSYTHE. No more than I should be of their visiting the Museum of Natural History; it does no harm to associate with prehistoric types.

MRS. LUPIN. There is always the temptation to revert.

MRS. FORSYTHE. My dear, the temptation is mine, not theirs.

MRS. LUPIN. Beware, Alicia, or this romantic rubber man will lead you a dance.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*with a smile of confidence*]. I have him just where I want him; and meanwhile I expect him to cure both Jack and Hilda of their foolishness.

MRS. LUPIN. Is there any sign of it?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Very decidedly. Jack mopes all day, with no indication of the happy lover; and Hilda and Betty Crichton spend all their spare time with Gerald; so I know they're safe.

[*The door at Back opens and Gerald Place enters from outdoors, carrying his hat, stick and gloves. The ladies turn at the sound of his coming in, and he moves toward them.*]

PLACE. This isn't fair. Why didn't you tell me that you were coming? [*Takes Mrs. Forsythe's hand.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. We just wandered in on the chance of finding you, and Crockett has made us very comfortable. I want you to know Henriette Lupin. [*Place turns and bows pleasantly to Mrs. Lupin.*]

PLACE. How d'ye do. Mrs. Jim Lupin? [*She nods her head, smiling.*] I used to know your husband.

MRS. LUPIN. So did I.

PLACE [*a little blankly*]. Oh, I didn't know; he's not — ?

MRS. LUPIN. No, he's *not.*

MRS. FORSYTHE. Gerald, returned exiles should not ask too many questions.

PLACE [*meekly*]. I know it, and I hope Mrs. Lupin will forgive my indiscretion.

MRS. LUPIN. After all these years away you must find many changes.

PLACE. Dear me, if you knew my bewilderment.

MRS. FORSYTHE. To be very frank, you are hopelessly behind the times.

PLACE. But I am doing my best to catch up.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I am afraid you never will.

PLACE. But why?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, you are always looking back over your shoulders and dreaming of what used to be.

PLACE. Eyes to the front, eh?

MRS. LUPIN. Cultivate forgetfulness.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Of others.

MRS. LUPIN. Keep your mind on tomorrow — and the day after.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Don't bother about yesterday.

PLACE [*smiling*]. Let the fleeting moment flit?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Wherever it listeth.

PLACE. And gather no moss.

MRS. LUPIN [*laughing*]. There's a working philosophy for you.

PLACE. But it leaves out what I am looking for.

MRS. FORSYTHE. What's that?

PLACE. The Fountain of Youth.

MRS. FORSYTHE. But my dear Ponce de Leon, we are showing you the broad, straight way to it.

PLACE. You've got the wrong fountain — or the wrong Blue-Book.

MRS. LUPIN. No, it's the right Blue-Book.

PLACE. Then it's too blue. Where's Hilda? I expected her here this afternoon.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I never see the child any more. Her days seem to be made up of engagements with you.

PLACE. But there are so many things to do, and the days are so short, I haven't had so much fun since I was [*recollecting himself*] — for twenty-five years.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Gerald, will you never grow up?

PLACE. I am doing the best I can to stunt my growth.

CROCKETT [*enters door at Back*]. A Mr. Healey to see you, sir!

PLACE. Ask him to wait, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*rising*]. No, a Mr. Healey must not wait. Come Henriette — [*Mrs. Lupin rises and the two ladies adjust their furs.*]

PLACE. But why rush off in this way? Mr. Healeys can always wait.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Because engagements are many and days short. [*Moving toward door at Back with Mrs. Lupin, followed by Place.*]

MRS. LUPIN. Good-bye, Mr. Place. Come and see me some time if the days are not too short.

PLACE. The evenings are longer.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You are both to dine with me next week.

MRS. LUPIN. Till then —

PLACE. Au revoir!

MRS. FORSYTHE. Good-bye, Gerald. No pranks, mind —

PLACE. Don't trust me. I've ceased to trust myself. [*They exit at Back. Place turns to Crockett.*] Show in Mr. Healey, and I am not to be disturbed except by, you know Crockett, the young people.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. But Mr. Guile and Miss Crichton are already here.

PLACE. No, are they? How long have they been here?

CROCKETT. Oh, half an hour, sir. I thought perhaps you might not wish them to meet Mrs. Forsythe, so I asked them to wait in the drawing-room, sir.

PLACE [*bending a look on Crockett, with screwed eye-brows*]. Crockett, you're a serpent.

CROCKETT [*apologetically*]. I am very sorry, sir, if I —

PLACE [*interrupting*]. I mean only from the aspect of your wisdom.

CROCKETT [*relieved*]. Thank you, sir.

PLACE. Tell Mr. Healey to come in.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exits at Back. Place crosses to door at L., opens it, and speaks in.*]

PLACE. If you two conspirators will kindly come out here, I will join the conspiracy. [*Kenneth Guile and Betty Crichton enter. Guile carries a MSS. of the play.*] Helloa, Kenneth!

GUILE [*smiling*]. Are you ready for dark deeds?

PLACE. The very darkest. [*To Betty Crichton, taking her hand.*] I had no idea you were hidden in there.

BETTY. The resourceful Crockett encouraged us to bide our time.

PLACE. Dutiful Crockett!

GUILE [*lighting a cigarette*]. Superb Crockett! [*They have moved over to R. Betty sits on the settee near the fireplace.*]

BETTY. We expected to find Hilda here.

GUILE. She had to go to the dentist's.

PLACE. Oh, very well, if Hilda prefers dentists to us! And just at an important moment too.

BETTY. What?

PLACE. Who do you suppose is here?

GUILE. Who?

PLACE. Your friend Harrison Healey.

GUILE. No, is he?

BETTY. Where?

[*Crockett enters at Back, ushering in Harrison Healey.*]

CROCKETT. Mr. Healey! [*Exits at back.*]

[*Healey is an Irishman of an alert, shrewd middle age. A long and varied experience in providing heterogeneous amusement to the American people, from prize-fights to moving-pictures, with excursions into the legitimate and illegitimate drama, has provided him with an assurance that passes, just North and South of Forty-*

Second Street, for wisdom, and a self-confidence that is relieved on occasion by traces of his Celtic origin. He is typical of the cant, ignorance and vulgarity that dominate the American theatre today. Place moves forward to meet him, and they move down to join the others.]

PLACE. Glad to see you, Mr. Healey.

HEALEY. How are you, sir?

PLACE. You know Mr. Guile!

GUILE [*shaking hands*]. Oh, yes, indeed!

PLACE. And let me present you to Miss Crichton!

HEALEY. Delighted!

BETTY [*nods pleasantly*]. How d'ye do?

PLACE. Sit down; we've got a lot of things to talk over.

HEALEY [*seating himself*]. May I smoke?

PLACE [*handing a case of cigars*]. Of course!

HEALEY [*bites off the end of a cigar, and lights it*]. Well, I suppose you want to know what I think of this young fellow's play. [*Nods towards Guile. Guile and Betty exchange apprehensive glances.*]

PLACE [*blandly, as he lights his cigar*]. Frankly, Mr. Healey, I don't!

HEALEY [*considerably taken aback; having to readjust his attitude*]. What, you haven't given up the idea already?

PLACE. Oh, no; I'm desperately committed to the idea; that is the reason why my interest in what anyone else thinks of the play is very vague. You understand, don't you?

HEALEY [*not understanding at all*]. Hm! — yes — but —

PLACE. Oh, I appreciate that I am taking rather high ground, assuming a rather egotistical attitude, but I share it with my little syndicate.

HEALEY. Syndicate — ?

PLACE. My associates: Mr. Guile, Miss Crichton and Miss Forsythe. My attorneys are already incorporating us.

BETTY. Do you mean a real company?

PLACE. I certainly mean a real company. Youth, unlimited, objects: the preservation of the young, the elimination of the old.

HEALEY [*quizzically*]. Say, are you sure you want to go into the theatrical business?

PLACE. Why?

HEALEY. It sounds to me as if you were organizing to start a combination foundling asylum and old man's home.

PLACE. Well, perhaps it is something like that; there is no reason, is there, why the theatre should be an institution exclusively for the feeble-minded?

HEALEY. But I don't see where I come in.

PLACE. You don't, except with your beautiful theatre, and your more than beautiful rental which has been paid in advance.

HEALEY. Don't you want my advice?

PLACE. Very little. [*To Guile.*] You're too young to need any advice, aren't you, Guile?

GUILE. I might stand for a small dose.

PLACE. I should be very careful; it is apt to cramp one's style.

HEALEY [*to Guile*]. You know I've always told you, my boy, your play needs a punch in it.

GUILE [*good-naturedly*]. American plays have too much punch.

PLACE. I suppose that's the reason audiences are getting sore.

HEALEY. Here, let me see your script; I'll show you what I mean. [*Guile hands him the MSS. and Healey runs through it.*] Now in the last act why don't you let the girl marry the old guy, just to spite the young fellow?

GUILE. But that would spoil the verisimilitude of the whole thing.

HEALEY. What the hell is that? [*To Betty.*] Excuse me, Miss. [*Betty nods and smiles.*]

GUILE. I mean the truth of it.

HEALEY. Forget it. We don't want truth; we want punch and pep.

BETTY [*very quietly*]. What the hell is pep?

HEALEY [*almost inarticulate, but waves his arms*]. Why, you know — zing!

PLACE [*as if completely satisfied*]. Oh, I see!

HEALEY. I tell you, you've gotta give 'em what they want.

BETTY [*sweetly*]. And who's going to tell you that?

HEALEY. We managers have to keep our ears to the ground.

GUILE. Listening for a noise like a success, eh?

HEALEY. Exactly!

PLACE. What does it sound like?

GUILE. It sounds like Ten Nights in a Bar-room or Uncle Tom's Cabin.

HEALEY. Believe me, son, if you ever make a noise as loud as either of them, you'll be heard around the world.

PLACE. But we don't want to be heard around the world.

HEALEY. What do you want to do? Keep it a secret?

PLACE. We are only committing ourselves at present to a splash in the Fountain of Youth.

HEALEY. Well, take it from me: you'll all get wet.

PLACE. You know I have rather specialized in rubber, Mr. Healey, so that won't hurt us.

HEALEY. All right, go as far as you like, but don't blame me if you all have to wear mittens and ear-tabs.

BETTY. But I thought you liked the play, Mr. Healey!

HEALEY. I do like it, but I've made it a rule for years to say to myself every night before I go to bed: "Healey, nix on the high-brow stuff."

PLACE. What do you mean by high-brow stuff?

GUILE. He means the kind of plays that people, whom you can't coax into the theatre, like to read.

HEALEY. Oh, I mean plays that are all talk about things that had better be left unsaid.

PLACE. I should think you would go in for moving pictures.

BETTY. Yes: the unspeakable drama.

HEALEY. Now, I don't want you to think I'm knocking your play, my boy.

GUILE. "My head is bloody, but unbowed."

HEALEY. You may get by at that: I've known rotten shows to play to capacity.

PLACE. Well now that we have all been encouraged by Mr. Healey's genial optimism, let's get down to cases. Here is the whole proposition in a nut-shell as I understand it. If I make any misstatement, Miss Crichton, kindly correct me. We have incorporated a company and dedicated it to Youth and the Drama. Specifically our object is to present on the public stage some high-brow nonsense by our young friend Guile; and our general purpose is to have a lot of fun doing it.

HEALEY. No matter how much it costs?

PLACE. You steal the words from me, Mr. Healey. Kenneth Guile is the managing director of the high enterprise. Mr. Healey's the Devil's Advocate.

HEALEY. What the devil's that?

PLACE. Oh, you are to constantly remind us what asses we're making of ourselves.

HEALEY. I'll do it.

PLACE. Thank you; and you, Miss Crichton: we appoint you guide, philosopher and friend to the undertaking.

GUILE. She's been that from the start.

PLACE. Precisely, and so must continue something she has so well begun.

BETTY. I'll accept if the position is purely honorary. But what are you going to do?

PLACE. If that means you are not going to actively guide, philosophize, and be friendly, we do not admit the qualification "honorary."

BETTY. I'll do my best then.

PLACE. I'm to have most of the fun, and pay the bills.

HEALEY. The perfect angel.

GUILE. The theatre is the one common ground, Healey, where fools and angels don't fear to tread.

HEALEY. Well, look out you don't step on one another's toes.

PLACE. I'm a footless angel.

GUILE. And I'll watch my step.

PLACE. Now it is up to you two to get busy.

HEALEY [*rising*]. My name is busy. [*To Guile.*] Come up to my office with me, and we'll make a start this afternoon.

GUILE. I'm with you. [*He turns to Place, as Healey walks over and shakes hands with Betty.*] There is no use of my trying to thank you, sir; but — but if you knew what this meant to me —

PLACE. If you get half the fun out of it that I do, we're quits. Run along now and make it a "knock out." Isn't that what our friend would call it?

GUILE [*laughing*]. I hope that is what we *will* call it. [*To Betty.*] Tell Hilda I shall see her tonight.

BETTY. I will; I shall wait here for her.

GUILE. Good-bye.

BETTY. Good-bye.

GUILE [*moves up and joins Place and Healey, who are by the door*]. All ready!

HEALEY [*shaking hands with Place*]. We will give you a run for your money.

PLACE. All I ask you to do is to give me a thrill!

HEALEY. You will get that all right; you will feel it clear through to your safe deposit vault. [*He and Guile exit out Back.*]

PLACE [*coming back to Betty*]. A nice, amiable barbarian, your Mr. Healey!

BETTY. Not *my* Mr. Healey!

PLACE. I suppose we shall have to say *our* Mr. Healey.

BETTY. That's better.

PLACE. I think so too. Do you know I've been so used all my life to saying "my" and "mine" and "yours," that "ours" opens up quite a beautiful vista.

BETTY [*smiling*]. I have always thought it the most attractive of the possessives.

PLACE. I think you are right. I have had such a rotten, self-centred existence, that it never occurred to me before.

BETTY. You never could convince me that selfishness is your great fault.

PLACE. What other?

BETTY. Generosity, perhaps.

PLACE [*laughing, not altogether mirthfully*]. Generosity! Whenever you see a successful man — I mean what the world calls successful, I'm one of 'em, it's a matter of cheap values; dollars and cents, — you may know he has become so by hard deliberate concentration on himself. Generosity and unselfishness are flowers that don't bloom in his garden.

BETTY. Isn't that rather a black picture?

PLACE. Hang it all, I am black — and blue too sometimes. But do you know ever since you young people walked into this room a fortnight since, with your enthusiasm, your high faith and joy in things that had

ceased to count with me long ago, I have been seeing differently, feeling differently. [*Breaking off from his serious tone.*] See here, you have been the ring-leaders in all this; what magic have you used?

BETTY. Oh, you have no idea of the secret incantations that Hilda and I performed long before you put in an appearance.

PLACE. I rather gathered, that day, that you were all prepared to meet a horned toad.

BETTY. Well, not exactly a horned one.

PLACE. Something completely odious though.

BETTY. Oh, yes, entirely odious.

PLACE. I like *that.* Will you kindly tell me where you gathered the fragments from which you pieced together this loathsome creature?

BETTY. They were scattered all about in rumours and conversations. We heard some rather nice things about you too. But we discarded them.

PLACE. Thank you. They didn't fit the picture?

BETTY. Not *our* picture.

PLACE. But didn't Mrs. Forsythe have a good word for me?

BETTY [*as if deeply considering*]. Let me see, did she? I think I should describe it as a condescending word.

PLACE. Oh!

BETTY [*wickedly*]. Mrs. Forsythe stoops from rather a height to us Lilliputians here below.

PLACE. Does she? I rather shiver when I think of Mrs. Forsythe in relation to this adventure of yours — I mean ours.

BETTY. The play?

PLACE. Yes!

BETTY. Do you?

PLACE. Yes; don't you?

BETTY. No, she can't make me shiver; I let her rave.

PLACE. Does she rave?

BETTY [*laughing*]. Ask her maid.

PLACE. I am asking her Secretary.

BETTY. I am not a confidential one.

PLACE. But we are partners now, and partnership is based on confidence.

BETTY. How do you mean partners?

PLACE. I mean that you and Hilda and Kenneth Guile and I share equally in all the profits of the play; I thought, of course, you understood that.

BETTY. I — I can't accept anything like that.

PLACE. You're not accepting anything, unless it's a little responsibility.

BETTY. Responsibility?

PLACE. Yes, if I get in trouble I've got to have someone to fall back on.

BETTY. What have I to do with it?

PLACE. I'll tell you what. You know very well that I came over to America intending to make a perfectly good guardian.

BETTY. You have far exceeded every one's expectations.

PLACE. I may say before I go on, that I hate irony. I came, as I was saying, filled with a sense of duty.

BETTY. Oh, we had a lively prevision of that.

PLACE. I can see now that you had. In the light of what has happened, I can also see that loaded to the gunwhales as I was with my sense of duty, I had about as much chance as a snow-ball in — in a fiery furnace.

BETTY [*demurely*]. I think you underestimate the chance you had.

PLACE. Against your magic? [*Snapping his fingers.*] Not the slightest in the world. Duty was dumped overboard incontinently; my idea of guardianship assumed very vague outlines, and I became as putty in your hands.

BETTY. Of course the whole thing was simplified for us when we discovered that you were a sentimentalist.

PLACE [*quizzically*]. Say, I wonder if you are cleverer than I think you are?

BETTY. How clever do you think I am?

PLACE. After what you have just said, I think you could almost tell me *how* you knew that I am a sentimentalist.

BETTY. That's of a simplicity.

PLACE. But how?

BETTY. One starts from the most perfect premise.

PLACE. Which is?

BETTY. That nine and a half men out of every ten are confirmed ones!

PLACE [*blankly*]. Oh — I see. And the women?

BETTY. Curiously enough, with them, it is quite the reverse. Only half a woman out of every ten is a sentimentalist. Women are realists, you know.

PLACE. I feel as if I had been led into the innermost sanctuary, and been given a glimpse of the great, eternal mystery.

BETTY. Nonsense. Every one knows that.

PLACE. Everyone?

BETTY. Everyone but the men.

PLACE. I have realized dimly for some days that I was quite out of my depth, being borne along on an irresistible tide, against which it was useless to struggle; but now I see clearly I am lost.

BETTY. Do you regret it?

PLACE. Regret it? If you knew how I adored it! I have only one terror.

BETTY. What?

PLACE. That someone will find me. That's our secret; you must swear not to betray me.

BETTY. Betray you to whom?

PLACE. Oh, to anyone who is not sympathetic, to anyone who has grown older and wiser, to anyone who doesn't believe in the Fountain of Youth.

BETTY. Do you mean Mr. Healey?

PLACE. You know very well, I don't mean Healey. I mean the whole world. Everybody outside of you [*there is something in the tone of his voice deeper than his usual banter that sends a shade over her face; he catches it immediately and amends what he intends to say*] and Hilda and Kenneth and me.

BETTY. The Youth Company.

PLACE. Exactly. So now you see why it is only fair that with all that responsibility, you should share as an equal partner. It would please me very much if you would. [*As she makes no reply.*] Particularly as your — my — I mean our friend Healey assures us there will be nothing to share, I think you might.

BETTY. Do you know, I have a confession to make.

PLACE. Don't do it: confessions are very much overdone nowadays.

BETTY. But they are good for the soul!

PLACE. I don't believe it. They only produce a sham humility that lowers one's moral tone.

BETTY. But this is a joint confession; it involves Hilda as well as myself.

PLACE. Oh, it's all very well to confess about somebody else. That's different. The delinquencies of others are very stimulating.

BETTY. Is there anything that appeals to you seriously?

PLACE. The tragedy of my life is an apparent flippancy. Like a cross-eyed man, I never seem to see what I am looking at.

BETTY. Do you?

PLACE. Of course I do! What a question to ask.

BETTY. Well, that is the reason that Hilda and I have hesitated. We have been afraid of boring you.

PLACE. Hesitated about what?

BETTY. Telling you what we've thought of all you've done. It has been tremendous.

PLACE. All I've done?

BETTY. I mean about the play. The Youth Company.

PLACE. Now, see here. If you or Hilda or the precocious author of that tragic comedy, the Fountain of Youth, ever dare to speak to me about what "I've done," I'll — I'll — Hang it all, I don't know what I'll do. But something very obnoxious and terrible.

BETTY [*resignedly*]. I knew you would take it that way. I told Hilda so.

PLACE. Then you are just trying to annoy me? [*Betty smiles at him.*] Now listen, I am going to tell you something, but you mustn't breathe this to a living soul.

BETTY. A confession?

PLACE [*shaking his head*]. Just an admission of folly.

BETTY. What's the difference?

PLACE. Oh, it's a very fine shade, but the distinction is there. You promise, mind, not a word to anyone.

BETTY. I promise!

PLACE. Well, then, could you have possibly guessed that I came all the way to America to find the Fountain of Youth?

BETTY [*much puzzled*]. To find it?

PLACE. Yes. For the last three or four years I have been searching for it high and low; finally I discovered what I thought was a clue and it brought me over here to New York.

BETTY. Yes, and then what happened?

PLACE. Then — [*Crockett appears at door Back.*]

CROCKETT. Mr. Forsythe wishes to see you, sir!

PLACE. Oh — Show him up, Crockett!

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exits at Back.*]

BETTY. You were just going to tell me what happened then.

PLACE [*laughing*]. Just then Jack Forsythe called.

BETTY. I must know the end of your mystery tale.

PLACE [*getting up*]. It hasn't ended. [*Moving toward her, and speaking in a tone that brings her to the alert in an instant.*] Tell me something, will you?

BETTY. What?

PLACE [*looking at her steadily, his feeling almost breaking through; then getting control of himself*]. Never mind; not now.

BETTY. But you will tell me the end of the story, sometime.

PLACE [*smiling*]. Oh, yes, *sometime;* that's inevitable. [*The door at Back opens and Jack Forsythe enters and comes toward them, not at first seeing Betty. Place calls to him pleasantly.*] Helloa, Jack!

JACK. Helloa. Hope I'm not bothering you!

PLACE. Not at all. Glad to see you.

JACK [*seeing Betty for the first time, gives a quick glance from her to Place*]. Oh, I didn't know you were here!

BETTY [*rising*]. I am waiting for Hilda!

PLACE. Miss Crichton and I have just got around to a discussion of the musical glasses.

JACK. Where are they playing?

BETTY [*smiling*]. Down the ages, Jack. [*To Place.*] May I go in the library? I know you have weighty matters on hand.

PLACE. Oh, don't run off like that!

JACK [*with a disagreeable little laugh*]. I have no secrets.

BETTY [*moving to door at R.*]. Invent some. [*To Place.*] When Hilda comes tell her where I'm hidden.

PLACE. I will! [*Betty exits at R. Both men follow her with their eyes as she passes out.*] Well, where have you been keeping yourself? I haven't seen you for an age.

JACK. Not my fault; I've telephoned and called half a dozen times.

PLACE. I've been devilish busy the last fortnight.

JACK. So it seems.

PLACE. I judge, from your tone, that you have a grievance. Have a chair.

JACK. I have: a damned big grievance.

PLACE [*pleasantly*]. Then perhaps you had better have two chairs. [*Jack lights a cigarette viciously and sits down.*] Now, what's the trouble?

JACK. I'll be hanged if I think you are much of a guardian.

PLACE. That fact doesn't worry you half as much as it worries me. Do you suppose I haven't a perfect understanding of my own incompetence?

JACK. How does that help me?

PLACE. It might make for a little tolerance on your part. You and I are innocent victims of circumstance, and we've got to make the best of it. What special kick have you got coming?

JACK. I am willing to lay all my cards on the table.

PLACE. All right, spread 'em out, and let's see what kind of a hand you've got.

JACK. In the first place, you know I'm in love with Betty Crichton!

PLACE. That does you great honour.

JACK. And you are doing everything you can to interfere.

PLACE. I'm not Miss Crichton's guardian, you know.

JACK. Perhaps you would like to be.

PLACE. Just exactly what do you mean by that?

JACK. I mean what anybody with half an eye can see.

PLACE. Of course there are none so blind as those who are being looked at; tell me what the fellow with half an eye can see.

JACK. He can see that you are "stuck on" her.

PLACE. By that happy phrase "stuck on" her, I judge the half-eyed fellow is jealous.

JACK. Well, why shouldn't he be? Is there a day in the week, an hour of the day that you are not together?

PLACE. You fill my time too completely with Miss Crichton.

JACK. On some pretext or other it's every day, isn't it?

PLACE. I don't like "pretext."

JACK. And how about this afternoon, here, just now?

PLACE. A happy accident.

JACK. Happy, all right, I suppose; I don't know about accident.

PLACE. I'm telling you.

JACK. I don't give a rap. All I know is that as my guardian you are taking an unfair advantage of me, and I don't propose to stand for it.

PLACE. So you are the green-eyed, one-eyed fellow! And you have originated the preposterous idea that we are rivals.

JACK. What's so preposterous about it?

PLACE [*struck by a new and wonderful idea*]. I don't know; but isn't it?

JACK. You may think so; I don't!

PLACE [*with great intensity*]. You really mean that?

JACK [*a little nonplussed and wavery*]. Yes, I mean it.

PLACE [*with great determination*]. Very well, I accept the challenge!

JACK [*vaguely*]. What challenge?

PLACE. Oh, it's a world-old defiance: the gage of youth.

JACK [*with some bluster*]. If you think I am going to stand aside just because you are a little older than I, you are mightily mistaken.

PLACE [*ecstatically*]. A *little* older than you! Jack, you are wonderful, wonderful. I haven't been treated by anyone as you have treated me this afternoon, for twenty years.

JACK. I may have had to be brutal, but I've had the hell of a lot of provocation.

PLACE. Brutal! No heart was ever nearer bursting than mine. Let joy be unconfined: the sacred fountain has gushed forth from the rock bidden by a child!

JACK [*looking at him suspiciously*]. What are you talking about?

PLACE. Miracles.

JACK. I don't believe in 'em!

PLACE. "O, ye of little faith." And yet you have successfully played the part of Frankenstein.

JACK. Who the devil was Frankenstein?

PLACE. He was a half-eyed, green-eyed fellow, who invented a monster. You've invented *me*, by Gad; and now you've got to take the consequences. And mind you, my lad, it's a fair field, and no favours.

JACK. I don't ask for any favours, but I'll be hanged if it's a fair field.

PLACE. What do you mean?

JACK. You hold the purse-strings.

PLACE [*contemptuously*]. You don't weigh the lady in any such balance as that, do you?

JACK. I know women.

PLACE. It's a dangerous knowledge. At least *pretend* you don't. *But* what about these purse-strings?

JACK. You pull mine as well as your own.

PLACE. What would you propose?

JACK. That we both start at scratch, instead of your having a handicap.

PLACE. What could be fairer than that?

JACK. You agree?

PLACE. So that is where your guardian has been taking an unfair advantage?

JACK. Exactly. She knows that you can hold me up for the next ten years, if you want to!

PLACE. And you think that would make a difference with her?

JACK [*complaisantly*]. You'll see!

PLACE. Oh, you half-eyed young men! Come, I'll tell you what I'll do!

JACK. Yes?

PLACE. On your next birthday — March, isn't it? [*Jack nods his head.*] I'll turn everything over to you!

JACK [*eagerly*]. You will?

PLACE. On one condition!

JACK. What's that?

PLACE. That if you win out, you will settle half of it absolutely on your wife!

JACK. H'm, that's a little stiff, isn't it?

PLACE. You couldn't buy a good yacht for much less.

JACK [*considering*]. No, perhaps not. Well, I'll go you. In writing, of course.

PLACE. My word.

JACK. But —

PLACE [*holding him with his eye*]. You mustn't judge men as casually as you do women.

JACK [*awkwardly*]. Oh, very well. Just as you say. A gentleman's agreement.

PLACE. Don't let's bother to define it, as long as we both understand perfectly.

[*Crockett enters at back. Place glances toward him.*]

CROCKETT. Doctor Train would like to see you for a moment, sir!

PLACE [*interested*]. Where is he?

CROCKETT. He's here, sir.

PLACE. Show him in, Crockett!

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exits at Back.*]

JACK. I want to say, I think you have behaved pretty decently.

PLACE [*smiling*]. For a guardian, eh? [*Jack nods his head.*] And a rival too: don't forget that!

JACK. You seem rather confident.

PLACE. If I am, you have made me so.

JACK. How's that?

PLACE [*gaily*]. Oh, by recognizing me as an equal. What do you think your mother will say?

JACK. What do *you* think she'll say?

PLACE. What do you mean?

JACK. She has rather a gift for saying things, you know.

PLACE. Oh, has she?

JACK. And we're both in the same boat now.

PLACE [*with decision*]. Not so you'd notice it. You are to paddle your own canoe.

JACK. But she'll take a hand if she gets a chance.

PLACE [*smiling*]. You have no fears that she will use a paddle, have you? [*Dr. Train enters at Back. Place gets up quickly and goes to meet him. His manner is cordial and gay, touched with high spirits that are in*

contrast to his usual humourously quizzical mood.] Hello, Langdon, what wonderful chance has brought you tapping at the door?

TRAIN [*shaking hands*]. Just going by: had a spare moment and a little curiosity, so thought I would drop in.

PLACE. A little curiosity, eh? Well, it's been rather slow developing. I haven't seen you for an age. You know Jack Forsythe. Jack, my friend, Doctor Train.

TRAIN [*nodding to Jack*]. How d'ye do!

JACK. How are you?

PLACE. Sit down now and tell me all about yourself.

TRAIN [*lighting a cigarette*]. Can't do it; haven't time.

PLACE. Oh, sit down!

TRAIN [*drops into a chair*]. What the deuce has happened to you? You look like a two-year-old!

PLACE [*gaily*]. My dear boy, I feel like an antelope: springing lightly from crag to crag — and all that sort of thing!

TRAIN [*drily*]. Don't overdo that crag to crag stuff here in New York; your foot might slip and land you in the subway.

PLACE [*laughing*]. You hear him, Jack? Good old Langdon, the parent's assistant or cautionary adviser.

JACK [*in a matter-of-fact manner, perfectly unconscious of the play between the other two*]. That's the right dope.

You've gotta mind your step. I know a fellow who went through a coal-hole on Fifth Avenue the other day, and sprained his knee.

PLACE. Ah, you New Yorkers live dangerously, Langdon. And that's the only way to get the savour of life.

TRAIN [*amused*]. What's the matter with you? You've got a twinkle in your eye and a twirl to your neck-tie that spell mischief.

PLACE. It's not such a damned hard word to spell, is it, Jack?

JACK. I never was very strong on spelling.

TRAIN. It has a lot of silent letters.

PLACE. Silent letters? What do you mean? How would you spell it?

TRAIN [*spelling*]. T-r-o-u-b-l-e.

PLACE [*laughing out*]. Right, Roger! Go up head. That's the advantage of a medical education: when in doubt, spell it trouble.

TRAIN. But we're never in doubt!

PLACE. Superb! Spell it trouble just the same! Upon my soul, Langdon, I don't see how you doctors survive in New York. It's the most invigorating, altogether exhilarating place I've ever struck.

TRAIN. How long are you going to stay?

PLACE. That's a nice, hospitable question. I'm going to stay forever.

TRAIN. Oh, well, in that case, I'll drop in again. [*Gets up.*]

PLACE. Sit down. I never in the world could recommend your bedside manners; you're too nervous, too restless.

TRAIN. I suppose it's that exhilarating New York atmosphere.

PLACE. Oh, you are acclimated!

TRAIN. You will be, too, before long!

PLACE. I feel as if I could do a hundred yards in ten seconds; I'll race you around Central Park tomorrow morning before breakfast.

JACK. That's a sporting proposition.

PLACE. Isn't it?

TRAIN [*laughing*]. You will not. Why don't you take on a fellow of your own age? Try Forsythe!

PLACE. Plaguer!

JACK. How the deuce could you run around anything before breakfast?

TRAIN. He's acclimated too!

PLACE. Decadents, both of you. Pity and contempt struggle within me.

TRAIN. Dream on, fond youth, but take my advice and cut out this antelope business.

JACK. Better join the Elks.

TRAIN. That's more like it.

PLACE. I snap my fingers at your feeble jests. [*As Train moves toward door at Back.*] You won't stay?

TRAIN. Not another minute. I'll dine with you next week, though.

PLACE. Splendid! Make it Thursday.

TRAIN. Thursday it is. Good-bye Mr. Forsythe.

JACK. Good-bye.

TRAIN [*as he and Place move toward B. together*]. How's that fountain?

PLACE. My dear Langdon, it gushes, simply gushes.

TRAIN. Worth all the journey, eh?

PLACE. Well, you know how journeys end.

TRAIN. I know how they ought to end. [*They pass out at Back. Jack glances at the door at R., then lights a cigarette and takes a couple of paces up the room and down again. He moves to door at R., opens it and calls in.*]

JACK. Betty, Betty!

BETTY [*off*]. Yes.

JACK. Come on in.

BETTY [*appearing at door*]. What is it? Where's Mr. Place?

JACK. He has just stepped out with a friend of his, Dr. Train.

BETTY. And no sign of Hilda?

JACK. Nope.

BETTY. What do you suppose is keeping her?

JACK. Dunno. [*She sits.*] Say, Betty, I've had a very satisfactory talk with Place.

BETTY [*with slight interest*]. Have you? I'm glad. What did you talk about?

JACK. My affairs chiefly — and you.

BETTY. Would it not have been better to have confined yourself entirely to your affairs?

JACK. But they involved you.

BETTY. In what possible way?

JACK. Well — [*Hesitating.*]

BETTY. In what possible way?

JACK. There is no use getting so icy about it.

BETTY. I am not getting icy about it; but in what possible way could I be a part of any discussion which took place between you?

JACK. You were very much a part of it; both from his side of the discussion and mine.

BETTY. What can you mean? Tell me what you mean.

JACK. Don't rush me so. I'll tell you; that's what I waited here for. [*Betty says nothing, and he goes on.*] You know as well as I do that ever since Place has been over here, he and mother have had their heads together trying to keep us apart.

BETTY. What utter nonsense!

JACK. Why nonsense?

BETTY. Why try to keep us apart, when we have never been together?

JACK. They both know I want to marry you.

BETTY. They both ought to know that your wants have no relation to mine.

JACK. Hold on now. You don't know what has happened. Place and I have come to an understanding.

BETTY. Oh, have you?

JACK. Yes. And considering everything it was pretty decent of him.

BETTY. Was it?

JACK. Yes. As my guardian or trustee he could have held me up interminably, but he has agreed to turn over my property to me on my birthday, next March. On one condition, and that's where you come in.

BETTY [*ominously*]. Yes. What is the condition?

JACK. That if we marry, I am to settle one half of everything on you, absolutely.

BETTY. Indeed. You and Mr. Place do seem to have covered a good deal of ground.

JACK. Pretty liberal, don't you think so?

BETTY. What is known as fifty-fifty, eh?

JACK. Exactly. So come on now, why can't we arrange things?

BETTY. It seems to me that you and Mr. Place have been busy about that.

JACK. Only the preliminaries. But don't you see how it clears away all the obstacles. I am my own master now.

BETTY. And would like to be mine?

JACK. Don't talk like that. You know I'd do anything in the world for you.

BETTY. Just a moment. You said you and Mr. Place had made an agreement — agreement was the word, I think.

JACK. No, I said we had come to an understanding.

BETTY. What was it?

JACK. I've just told you. That I was to settle on you —

BETTY [*impatiently*]. No, no, that wasn't it. What did you agree to do besides that?

JACK. I didn't agree to do anything. [*Uncomfortably.*] What's the use of trying to catechise me this way? I've told you everything there is to tell.

BETTY. If I was a part of the happy arrangement between you and Mr. Place, I insist on knowing just what part.

JACK. Oh, I guess I made something of an ass of myself. But when I came here this afternoon, I was sore.

BETTY. Sore at what?

JACK. Sore at Place. I was sick and tired of you and him playing around together, all the time. Of course I see now that he was just trying to help mother's foolish game; to keep us apart.

BETTY. To help your mother's game?

JACK. Yes.

BETTY. He told you that?

JACK. Actions speak louder than words; hasn't he consented to help us out? I told him he was playing a rotten unfair game: unfair to you, unfair to me.

BETTY. You told him that?

JACK. Why shouldn't I?

BETTY. There is no reason that would touch you. Go on — go on, tell me what then.

JACK. Then after a little more talk, like a good old sport, he agreed to come across.

BETTY. It was then that he said he would turn your money over to you?

JACK. Yes.

BETTY. Jack Forsythe, are you telling me the truth?

JACK. Ask him, if you don't believe me; of course I don't expect you to bind yourself till you know it's all right.

BETTY [*breaking out*]. It's unbelievable, unbelievable! And you two parleyed, bargained and entered into agreement, with me on one hand and money on the other! How dared you! Am I the kind of person that, even to your dull sense, could be bought?

JACK. Come, I say. That's rather rough.

BETTY. How could you have dragged me into such depths, either of you!

JACK. It wasn't my fault.

BETTY. Your vulgar little mind couldn't grasp the idea of its being a fault. You have the sensibility — of a sea-turtle, and a spirit that is as contemptible.

JACK [*angrily*]. I'm not going to put up with that kind of talk.

BETTY. If you stay to listen, you'll put up with it. But why don't you go? Have you no dull feeling that I can touch with my contempt?

JACK [*tries to hold her eye defiantly but wavers, with a little nervous laugh*]. Oh, very well, if you want to make a fool of yourself! [*After a moment he turns and moves toward the door; as he reaches it, he turns to her again.*] This is the end, eh?

BETTY. There never was a beginning.

[*He exits at Back. She stands motionless for several seconds, then throws herself into a chair and sobs as if her heart would break. Gradually she regains control of herself, and then with feminine instinct she rises and goes to mirror over mantel-shelf to arrange her hat and hair. While so doing, Crockett enters at Back.*]

CROCKETT. I beg pardon, Miss Crichton, but there is a telephone message from Miss Forsythe.

BETTY. Yes, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Saying that it was so late she would not call for you.

BETTY. Thank you. I shall be going, then.

[*The light in the room has gradually become dim, through the preceding scene, until it is barely twilight,*

the room getting a faint glow from the fire of coals. Crockett switches on the light to a couple of lamps, as Betty moves to the door at Back. Just before she reaches it, the door opens and Place enters quickly, stopping abruptly as he comes face to face with her.]

PLACE [*gaily, his manner showing a sort of high elation*]. Oh, I am so glad I caught you before you were quite gone; confess, you were just about to run away.

BETTY [*constrained and distant*]. Yes, I must go. [*Crockett exits down L.*]

PLACE. Oh, no; not just yet, please.

BETTY. I must; Hilda is not coming.

PLACE. Where's Jack?

BETTY. He went some time ago.

PLACE. You will stay just — just a few minutes, won't you?

BETTY. I am afraid I can't; I am dining out and it is late.

PLACE. But I wanted to tell you the end of the story.

BETTY. What story?

PLACE. Don't you remember? The mystery tale.

BETTY. Oh, that!

PLACE. Yes.

BETTY. I am afraid the mystery has faded quite out of it, and I know you will understand when I say that the thing you meant is impossible.

PLACE [*blankly*]. Impossible? You mean that — ?

BETTY [*breaking in hurriedly, breathlessly*]. I mean that while I do not doubt the kindness of your intention, you misunderstood me entirely. Good night. [*She moves quickly toward door at Back.*]

PLACE [*rather dazed*]. But Miss Crichton!

BETTY [*her hand on the door, turns*]. I — I hope this will not interfere with the Fountain of Youth.

PLACE. The Fountain of Youth. I'm afraid it will never play.

BETTY. You mean you will not produce it?

PLACE [*vaguely*]. Produce it? Oh, you mean our little comedy? And could you think that of me?

BETTY. I didn't know. I am sorry. Good-bye.

PLACE [*faintly*]. Good-bye.

[*She passes out quickly. He makes a step toward the door, as it closes quietly behind her, leaving him staring. After a moment, he turns with a shrug, and moves slowly down, sinking dejectedly into an armchair. Crockett enters at R.*]

CROCKETT. Shall you dress tonight, sir?

PLACE. No, Crockett. Dressing-gown and slippers; home tonight.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Moves off quietly and exits at B.*]

PLACE [*takes the MSS. of the Fountain of Youth from the table and runs over its pages casually. Stops, and reads aloud*]: "Enter an old man of forty-seven."

[*Laughs out mirthlessly, and runs on through the pages of the MSS. Stops and reads aloud again.*]

"For Youth is Youth
And Age is Age
And never the Twain shall meet.
Curtain."

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE. *The same as the preceding acts.*

TIME. *Several weeks later. Night.*

AT RISE. *Gerald Place, Mrs. Forsythe, Dr. Train, Mrs. Lupin, Hilda and Kenneth Guile are discovered. All are in evening dress. Crockett is assisting a smart young man-servant to collect several after-dinner coffee cups from about the room. He places them on the tray, which the servant picks up and they leave the room at door R.*

MRS. LUPIN. What a very interesting man your friend Dr. Train is.

PLACE. Oh, yes, for a merely professional fellow, Langdon has some almost human qualities.

MRS. LUPIN. Is he a specialist?

PLACE. Yes, indeed. I should think you would have heard of him.

MRS. LUPIN. What is it? Something dreadful and unmentionable?

PLACE. Oh, no; he's the great authority on imaginary diseases. They are very prevalent, he tells me; almost epidemic.

MRS. LUPIN. Really! I thought they were incurable.

PLACE. They were till Langdon came along. That's where his genius had a chance to expand. Why, he cured me.

MRS. FORSYTHE. What are you two talking about over there?

PLACE. I was just telling Mrs. Lupin how Dr. Train had cured me.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You! What ailed you, my dear?

PLACE. I fancied I had heart trouble, very acute, aggravated by a nervous affection that always kept me looking backwards.

MRS. FORSYTHE. And he has accomplished a cure?

PLACE. Absolutely.

TRAIN. A most difficult case, Mrs. Forsythe.

PLACE. I have stepped out onto the high clear ground that you and Mrs. Lupin, and all sensible, normal people tread.

MRS. LUPIN. No regrets?

PLACE. None. Oh, I say none, but I shall probably keep one or two tame ones, to play with on gloomy days.

MRS. LUPIN. So it took a specialist to convince you that there is a difference between the blood pressure of twenty-five and that of forty.

PLACE. Forty-seven. Don't falter over the hateful numbers.

TRAIN. Aren't you getting just a little morbid, Gerald?

PLACE. Do you call a reformed sentimentalist morbid?

MRS. LUPIN. Really reformed?

PLACE. Really. Retrospect is no longer a luxury that I indulge in. The foolishness of hugging a delusion and imagining it an ideal has faded quite away.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I don't think it was Dr. Train's intention, my dear, that you should go to any such extremes.

TRAIN. It won't hurt him; his was a bad case.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I doubt if it is really good for you — all at once.

PLACE. But it was you that first started me on the right track. You know it was; you and Mrs. Lupin.

MRS. LUPIN. You mustn't take women literally; there are all sorts of discounts, averages, variations to be allowed for. He is not a feminist, Alicia, and has none of the modern knack of analyzing the sex. [*They all laugh. Place calls over to Hilda, sitting with Kenneth at the table looking over some illustrated papers, and talking quietly.*] Oh, Hilda!

HILDA [*coming to him*]. Yes.

PLACE. Am I not to hear a little music?

HILDA [*rising*]. Of course if you wish it. What shall it be?

PLACE. Oh, something charming, that *you* like. [*She moves toward door at L.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE [*calling to her*]. Nothing modern or interesting, Hilda; make it about 1850, my dear.

HILDA [*smiling*]. Very well. [*She exits at L., followed by Kenneth.*]

PLACE. Thank you.

TRAIN. *Arrières pensées.*

MRS. LUPIN [*to Train*]. Let's go in, shall we? I adore that.

TRAIN. Yes, indeed. [*They move to L.*]

PLACE. I am rather amazed, Mrs. Lupin, that you should surrender to anything so old fashioned and uninteresting.

MRS. LUPIN [*over her shoulder, laughing*]. Oh, I am not as modern as you think.

TRAIN. Truly?

MRS. LUPIN [*gaily*]. None of us are. [*They pass out at L.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. So you fold your tents and steal away.

PLACE. That's an old habit of mine.

MRS. FORSYTHE. And you really sail tomorrow?

PLACE. At ten. Crockett already has me boxed and tagged.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I didn't take you seriously, Gerald, when you said this was to be a little farewell dinner.

PLACE. Dear lady, you have never taken me seriously. Why, at this late day, try to alter the habit of a life time.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I feel, somehow, that we haven't come up to your expectations, — that you are disappointed in us.

PLACE. Us?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh, New York — America.

PLACE. Ah, well, disappointments are frequent and pleasures are rare. I can see now that it is no place for me. America belongs to the young, to all those who love change for its own sake. Frankly, I don't; and I shall journey back to a land where old age and custom have their sanctions.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I am afraid your guardianship bored you.

PLACE. I tried to do my duty. It was something of a triumph, I think, to have been able to meet your wishes too. I have, haven't I?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*hesitating*]. Well —

PLACE. Haven't I?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Partly. Jacky of course is disconsolate.

PLACE. The intimation which Jacky has received, that he can't buy everything he wants, will do him no harm.

MRS. FORSYTHE. You quite agree with me that Betty Crichton was not the person for Jacky?

PLACE. I should say I did.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I shudder when I think of what poor Jacky has escaped.

PLACE. He would have devoted his whole life to her — for about a month.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Minx!

PLACE [*with labored unconcern*]. Where did she go?

MRS. FORSYTHE. She's stopping with the Floyd-Farquhars; he's a cousin or something or other of her mother's. I've forbidden Hilda to have any communication with her — but I believe she sees her every day.

PLACE. I suppose that's to avoid communicating with her.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Hilda is a stubborn child, very like her father. And since that wretched play of Kenneth Guile's has been produced, I feel that my hold over her is slipping [*reproachfully*]. I have a feeling that you could have prevented it.

PLACE. I am not a police captain: I can't censor the drama.

MRS. FORSYTHE. And of course it would be a success, just to irritate me.

PLACE [*with a fine air of detachment*]. Oh, is it a success?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Don't you read the papers? The seats are selling eight weeks in advance.

PLACE. Is anybody buying them?

MRS. FORSYTHE. I've had at least a dozen friends call me up since the first night and ask me for tickets.

PLACE [*irritated*]. Why, do they think it's a charity performance?

MRS. FORSYTHE. People have the quaintest ideas about the theatre these days; they either want to pay ten dollars for a seat — or nothing at all.

PLACE. Admit that you are reconciled a little to the idea of Hilda and Guile.

MRS. FORSYTHE. On the contrary, my dear Gerald, I am more fearful then ever. Clever men never make good husbands.

PLACE. How absurd! You and I know a lot of good husbands.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Yes, but they are not clever.

PLACE. Aren't you dogmatizing a little?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Think of always having a brilliant man living with one.

PLACE. But if I gather your meaning, they are always living with someone else.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Well, even that's uncomfortable.

PLACE. I am confident from what I've seen of him, that Guile will settle down to a dull and commonplace middle age. Playwrights are apt to, they tell me.

MRS. FORSYTHE. No, my dear, I've seen his play twice. He is too witty. Hilda would never have a chance

to talk back — and at the same time keep her self-respect.

PLACE. Cheer up, Alicia. Remember: "A son is a son till he gets him a wife, but a daughter's a daughter the whole of her life."

MRS. FORSYTHE. That's all very well, but there's no rhyme for son-in-law.

PLACE. There's a reason.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Entirely inadequate. Why, my dear, there are things in that boy's play about women that no man knows — or should know — and that very few suspect.

PLACE. Maybe he was only guessing.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Then he's a genius.

PLACE. Alicia, I think you are unnecessarily alarmed, just borrowing trouble. Marriage is the perfect antidote for genius.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I don't know, Gerald, whether you are trying to be flippant or cynical, but neither attitude becomes you.

PLACE. I am simply trying to justify my belief that Kenneth Guile and Hilda will be as happy as larks.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*rising*]. Oh, well, I suppose I shall bow to the inevitable.

PLACE [*rising*]. It's a good acquaintance to cultivate, dear lady, — at least a bowing acquaintance.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*moving slowly toward door at L.*]. I'm not crazy about your lark theory, though.

PLACE [*moving after her*]. We shall see, we shall see. Let's give it the benefit of a little hope. You're not going yet?

MRS. FORSYTHE [*stopping near the door*]. Oh, yes, it's time. I must gather up Henriette and Hilda and run along.

PLACE. I'd like to speak to Kenneth and Hilda a moment. I shall not have a chance again.

MRS. FORSYTHE. I'll tell them. I suppose it is unnecessary, Gerald, to tell you how much I am going to miss you?

PLACE. Truly?

MRS. FORSYTHE. Perhaps you will allow me a place amongst those tame regrets?

PLACE. If you wish it.

MRS. FORSYTHE. And promise me something?

PLACE. Anything.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*a little wistfully*]. You'll never forget that slim girl in coral pink?

PLACE. Ah, coral pink and mignonette shall always remain symbols of something rather sacred.

MRS. FORSYTHE. It might have been different, you know.

PLACE. The inevitable was an early intimate of mine, Alicia.

MRS. FORSYTHE [*putting out her hand*]. Good-bye, Gerald.

PLACE [*taking it to his lips*]. Good-bye.

[*She withdraws her hand quickly, opens the door at L., and passes out. Place moves over to the fireplace and stands for a moment looking into the fire, then turns as Hilda and Guile enter from L.*]

HILDA [*as they come toward him*]. Mother said you wanted to speak to us.

PLACE. See here, young lady, and you too, young fellow, I've got something to say to you.

GUILE. What have we been doing now?

HILDA. Anything very dreadful?

PLACE [*seating himself*]. Your lady mother has just been roasting me for your collective shortcomings.

GUILE. I'll stand for "shortcomings," but not for "collective"; Hilda hasn't any.

PLACE. That's very pretty repartee; but fine words butter no parsnips.

HILDA [*sitting on the arm of his chair*]. I detest parsnips.

PLACE. I do, too, so I suppose it was unfortunate to mention them.

GUILE. Very; don't let it happen again.

HILDA. What did mother say?

PLACE. Oh, she said I was a rotten guardian.

HILDA [*reproachfully*]. She didn't say that.

PLACE. I have taken the liberty of paraphrasing her remark, but the meaning is accurate.

GUILE. We beg to differ, even from such high authority, don't we, Hilda?

HILDA. I should say we did. You have been an adorable guardian.

PLACE. But I am beginning to suspect that that is just what a guardian shouldn't be. It is too late now, though, to make amends, so it is up to you two youngsters to justify my amiable weaknesses.

GUILE. We shall guard your reputation as our own.

PLACE. There is just one thing I want to say in self-defence: I know a good fellow, Kenneth, when I see him.

GUILE [*quietly*]. Thank you, sir.

PLACE [*taking Hilda's hand*]. And I know a nice girl too, when I see her. And after all, that's the ideal thing, isn't it: a good fellow and a nice girl together?

HILDA [*demurely*]. We think so.

PLACE. And if one has assisted a little in the consummation of the ideal, what the deuce is the use of worrying about non-essentials?

HILDA. Nobody is worrying but mother; and if she doesn't she's unhappy.

PLACE. Oh, well, her objections are now purely academic; we have removed them from the realm of reality.

GUILE. Thanks to you.

PLACE [*impressively*]. Don't either of you, in an expansive moment, ever betray my connection with the play.

GUILE. Of course we promise that.

HILDA [*roguishly*]. What harm would it do?

GUILE. She might have the marriage annulled.

PLACE. Your mother considers me feeble-minded, but she still thinks me upright.

HILDA. But it would be such fun.

PLACE [*hopelessly to Guile*]. Fun! Kenneth, can you follow the curious convolutions of this young person?

GUILE. Oh, I shall take her in hand! [*Hilda makes a "face" at him.*]

PLACE. Please do, or life will be one long misery.

HILDA [*a little hurt*]. You don't mean that.

PLACE. Of course I don't mean it, you foolish child. You know I was only teasing. Life for you and Kenneth is in the laps of the gods, and you are the gods, you young people; the world is yours to make of what you will. So keep your hearts young and gay, and don't be afraid to wear them on your sleeves occasionally, in spite of what wise old cynics say. I shan't see you again for a very long while, perhaps —

HILDA. Don't say that.

PLACE. Well, one never knows. But however long it may be, I want you two always to remember that you have helped to make my little visit here the happiest time in my life. I really mean that. The very happiest.

GUILE. You have never allowed us to say a word, Hilda and me, about all you've done, and what it has meant to us.

PLACE. You are young enough to be grateful, my boy, and I am old enough to recognize gratitude and to prize it. If I've helped a little, pass it on to another fellow when you get the chance.

GUILE [*very much touched and trying awkwardly not to show it*]. I'm afraid I've always been a selfish beast, but — I hope — I think you've cured me.

PLACE [*hastily, to cover his own feelings*]. There is just one other thing, and then we must run in and join our guests. It's about our little company.

HILDA. *Little* company! [*With quite the professional air.*] Do you know what we are playing to?

PLACE [*amused*]. Very agreeable and intelligent audiences, I hope.

HILDA. What do you suppose our royalties were last week?

PLACE. Very dignified and presentable, as becomes royalties, I trust.

HILDA. They were over eight hundred dollars, weren't they, Kenneth? And Mr. Healey says the profits —

PLACE [*interrupting*]. Hilda, dear, spare us Healey's remarks about profits.

GUILE. I think she's becoming commercialized, don't you?

PLACE. She'll be organizing a syndicate, if we're not careful. — Well, what I was about to say, if I may be allowed to get a word in edge-wise.

HILDA [*contritely*]. Forgive me.

PLACE. Forgive you! Don't you know I love it all — for your sakes — just as much as you do? But you've got to take charge of the whole thing now, Kenneth. I'm out.

HILDA. Out?

GUILE. Out?

PLACE. Yes, out. My attorney Phillips understands everything, or pretends to, and has instructions to follow your orders.

GUILE. Where is he?

PLACE [*vaguely*]. He's way down town somewhere in a very tall building. You'll find him; and he's a very decent chap, with an abysmal ignorance and suspicion of everything connected with the drama; so of course you will get on swimmingly.

GUILE [*overwhelmed*]. But aren't you entrusting me with — with too much?

PLACE. Hang it all, it's your play, isn't it?

GUILE. Yes, but —

PLACE [*interrupting*]. Then why the devil should I be bothered with it? And just one thing more: I am sorry the other member of our corporation isn't here. [*Casually.*] Where is Miss Crichton, Hilda?

HILDA. She went over to Devon ten days ago, and isn't back yet. I telephoned this morning.

PLACE. Well, you'll look out for that, won't you, Kenneth? Explain things to her after you've seen Phillips.

GUILE. Indeed, I will.

PLACE. We owe a lot to her, you know.

GUILE. No one realizes that more than I.

HILDA. What a wretched mess mother and Jack made of it all! Jack was abominable and mother so unfair. [*The door opens at L. and Mrs. Forsythe, Mrs. Lupin and Dr. Train enter.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. Do I gather, Gerald, that this is your idea of giving a farewell party?

PLACE [*to Train*]. You evidently haven't been very entertaining, Langdon.

TRAIN. But it isn't my farewell party.

PLACE [*disregarding him*]. It is so disconcerting, Mrs. Lupin, to invite a lion to dine, and then to have him refuse to roar.

MRS. LUPIN [*mischievously*]. You mustn't feed 'em so well.

PLACE. That's the idea. A little Swedish bread and a kind word, until after he performs.

MRS. LUPIN. Perfect.

TRAIN [*laughing*]. Lion-Tamer!

PLACE. The penalty of distinction.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Come along, Henriette; tempus fidgets, and we must be getting home; at least I must, and Hilda here.

MRS. LUPIN. And I too.

PLACE [*looking at his watch*]. It is only a little after ten, and I don't sail till tomorrow morning.

MRS. FORSYTHE. We didn't come for a wake; we came to say "good-bye" and now we are going to say it.

PLACE. Brutally stubborn.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Come, Hilda dear.

HILDA. Yes, mother. [*Crockett appears at door Back.*]

PLACE. What is it, Crockett?

CROCKETT. A Mr. Healey, sir, to see you.

PLACE. Not just yet, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir.

PLACE. Call Mrs. Forsythe's car.

CROCKETT. It's at the door, sir. [*Exits at Back.*]

MRS. FORSYTHE. See here, Gerald, is this "Mr. Healey," a sort of high sign between you and Crockett?

PLACE. What do you mean?

MRS. FORSYTHE. I have a very vivid impression that whenever it is time for me to go, Crockett always appears and announces "a Mr. Healey." [*They move slowly toward door at Back, followed by Guile and Hilda, and Train and Mrs. Lupin.*]

PLACE. Absurd! There's nothing cryptic about Healey. He's Kenneth's manager.

MRS. FORSYTHE. What's he doing here?

PLACE [*carelessly, with a look at Kenneth*]. To see Kenneth, I suppose.

GUILE. Oh, yes, I had an appointment with him.

MRS. FORSYTHE. Oh! [*They exit at back, talking. Mrs. Lupin and Train move slowly toward the door.*]

MRS. LUPIN. Don't forget, then — Wednesday at eight.

TRAIN. Forget? Of course not. [*Laughing.*] Swedish bread, I suppose.

MRS. LUPIN. But of course. [*Shaking hands with him.*] Good-bye.

TRAIN. Good-bye. [*She passes out. Train stands in the doorway, through which the hum of voices comes.*] I'll roar like any sucking dove.
[*Crockett enters at L., showing in Healey.*]

CROCKETT. Mr. Place will be here presently.

HEALEY. [*He wears a dinner-jacket of bluish colored material, a white brocaded waistcoat, pleated shirt with an aggressive stud of brilliants, and a white bow tie.*] All right, my man, no hurry. [*Train turns back into the room. Crockett exits at back.*]

TRAIN [*nodding pleasantly*]. How are you? Mr. Healey, I presume.

HEALEY. Yes.

TRAIN. Mr. Place and Mr. Guile will be here in a moment.

HEALEY. Oh, is the young fellow here?

TRAIN. Yes.

HEALEY. Some team, them two. I used to think they were a couple of high-brow dubs. But take it from me, they are a pair of wise guys.

TRAIN. I understand you produced Mr. Guile's play?

HEALEY. Yes. Have you seen it?

TRAIN. Oh, yes! I was there the first night.

HEALEY. Some show, isn't it? It's got class, too.

TRAIN. Very interesting.

HEALEY. I've seen it a dozen times, and I don't know what it's all about, but the ticket-rack looks good to me every night. I understand *that.*

TRAIN. Big audiences?

HEALEY. Turning 'em away; just like taking milk from babies. [*Laughing.*] Why, I didn't think there was any more chance of its getting over than an elephant on a foot-bridge. But those gazabes turned the trick and I take off my hat to 'em.

TRAIN. I didn't know Mr. Place had anything to do with it.

HEALEY. You didn't? He was the main push. The young fellow only wrote the play; Place threw in the big check book.

TRAIN [*amused*]. Oh, I see! It's easier to write plays than checks.

HEALEY. You've said something. [*Place, followed by Guile, enters at Back and joins the other two.*]

PLACE. Hello, Healey! How's the director of the fine arts tonight?

HEALEY. Fine. How's yourself? [*To Guile.*] Evening, kiddo. How are you? Going strong?

GUILE. Bully! How was the house tonight?

HEALEY [*with a wink*]. Pretty rotten — I don't think. Sold out at six o'clock and all the hotels hollerin' for more.

PLACE. How about that punch?

HEALEY. Quit your kidding — I knew it didn't have a punch; it's a wallop.

PLACE. Oh, excuse me! This is my friend, Dr. Train, Mr. Healey.

TRAIN. We introduced ourselves.

HEALEY [*taking a cigar from his pocket, bites off end, and lights it*]. I didn't mean to butt in.

PLACE [*taking cigars from table*]. You're not butting in. Here, have one of these.

HEALEY. No, thanks. This is all right. [*Place hands cigars to Train and Guile, and lights one himself.*]

HEALEY. I heard you were going away tomorrow, and I had a little business I wanted to talk over with you.

PLACE. This is the last chance you will have to talk business with me. Go ahead. [*As Healey glances from Train to Guile.*] Oh, don't mind these fellows.

Train will not know what you're talking about, and Guile will pretend not to.

HEALEY. Just as you say. [*Blows a cloud of smoke and then brings forth with an air of great importance.*] How would you like to dispose of your interest in the play?

PLACE. I have disposed of it.

HEALEY [*taken off his balance*]. What! You've sold it!

PLACE. I didn't say I'd sold it; I said I had disposed of it.

HEALEY. Say, what's the matter with all youse people? We're not taking in wooden money up at that show. I tell you it's the real thing.

PLACE. I'm not casting aspersions on your show, and if I remember correctly my enthusiasm for it antedated your own.

HEALEY. What do you want to sell out for, then?

PLACE. I haven't sold out; I've given out.

HEALEY. Whad'ye mean?

PLACE. I've divided my interest between the three other members of our company.

GUILE. You didn't tell me that.

PLACE. Didn't I? Oh, well, you'll get the details from Phillips.

HEALEY. Where's the Devil's advocate come in?

PLACE. The devil take the hindmost, Mr. Healey.

HEALEY. It's a way he has, and occasionally sticks a harpoon into the foremost. I'd have given twenty-five thousand dollars for your interest.

PLACE. Negotiate with Guile.

HEALEY. I've been in the show business all my life. I've managed everything from a Kickapoo medicine wigwam to a troupe of performing seals, but upon my soul, I've never been tied up with an outfit like this.

GUILE. What's the matter?

HEALEY. We've got a clean knock-out, and nobody takes any interest in it but me.

PLACE. How do you mean "nobody"?

HEALEY. This afternoon, I tried to buy out one of your partners: nothin' doin'. Said she didn't own any interest in it, and gave me to understand that if she'd known it was going to be a success, she wouldn't have had anything to do with it.

GUILE. Who the deuce are you talking about?

HEALEY. Miss Crichton, the guide, philosopher and friend of the whole shootin' match. Can you beat that — or tie it?

PLACE. But Miss Crichton isn't in town.

HEALEY. Isn't she? Well she was between five and six this afternoon.

PLACE [*incredulous*]. Are you sure?

HEALEY. No, I'm not sure of anything since I've been associated with this blooming Fountain of Youth. But I'll tell you what happened in my trance.

PLACE. Go ahead.

HEALEY. This afternoon, she called me up and asked for two seats for Saturday matinee; said she would send me a check for them. "Owners don't have to pay," sez I. "Wha'd'ye mean by 'owners'?" sez she. "I mean," sez I, "the unfortunate group of which you're one whose goin' to divide a hundred thousand dollars out of this show." "The hell you say," sez she.

PLACE. What!

HEALEY. Or words to that effect. "Come right up here," sez she, "and explain yourself." So I jumped into a taxi and went up. Well, you might a thought I was the sheriff trying to collect a dressmaker's bill. "It's outrageous," sez she, "that I should be dragged into a money-makin' proposition like that." "That's between you and Place and Guile," sez I. "I didn't coax you in. But here's twenty-five thousand dollars," sez I. "Cut out the degradin' thing."

PLACE. What happened then?

HEALEY. When I woke up, I was countin' the house after the third act — and still thought I was dreamin'.

TRAIN. I rather think I'd like a piece of this magic investment, that no one seems interested in.

HEALEY. You're well out of it, doctor; if you had it you'd be bewitched.

PLACE. I'll tell you what, Healey: you talk this over with Guile. I am sure you can make a deal with him.

GUILE. Of course you can.

HEALEY. My boy, I am not even sure of you. Tomorrow you'll probably want to wash your hands of the whole thing, and turn it over to the Newsboy's Protective Association.

GUILE. You'll see.

HEALEY [*getting up*]. Come along now, and we'll talk it over. I'd hate to let you sleep on it.

GUILE. All right, come along.

HEALEY. You're witness to his good intentions.

PLACE. I encourage them.

HEALEY [*shaking hands with Train*]. Good night, doctor, happy to have met you.

TRAIN. Good night.

GUILE [*to Place*]. Good night. I shall be at the boat tomorrow.

PLACE. Don't bother, my boy.

GUILE. Hilda and I will be there.

PLACE [*shaking hands with Guile*]. Good night and God bless you.

HEALEY [*moving towards the door with Place*]. There's just one thing I want you to tell me.

PLACE. What?

HEALEY. How did you know it was a good play?

PLACE. I read it.

HEALEY. Go on with you. I read fifty plays a week. I dunno a good one from a bad one.

PLACE. How should you? There's one infallible rule for selecting a good one, though.

HEALEY. Tell it me quick.

PLACE. Blindfold yourself and draw one from a pile. Then have some clever chap like Guile here dramatize it.

HEALEY. You're always kiddin'. Good night and good luck to you. [*They shake hands.*]

GUILE [*to Train*]. Good night, doctor.

TRAIN. Good night, Guile.

PLACE. Good night. [*Healey and Guile exit at Back. Place closes the door, presses a button and then moves over to Train.*] What do you think of my friend Healey as an arbiter of the true and the beautiful?

TRAIN. Incredible, unless one had seen him.

PLACE. Incredible, just as America is, unless you see it, know it.

TRAIN [*drily*]. You've been in America about three months in the last twenty years. You really ought to write a book about it.

PLACE [*laughing*]. I shall. The return of the native, or things I should have liked to see in the United States — but didn't. [*Crockett enters from B.*]

CROCKETT. Did you ring, sir?

PLACE. A little Scotch, and ice, and a syphon, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Yes, sir. [*Exits at B.*]

PLACE. We'll have a farewell night-cap, together.

TRAIN. How did you come to get mixed up with Healey?

PLACE. Oh, the youngsters needed a helping hand with this play and he was the amazing medium through which we uncovered it to the delighted gaze of the public.

TRAIN. I can't see you dabbling in the theatre.

PLACE. Can't you? Well, let me tell you, Langdon, I've had more fun in the last six weeks than I've ever had in my life. The theatre is the supreme test: if you like it you're young, if you don't like it you're old.

TRAIN. Isn't that a rather arbitrary classification?

PLACE. Perhaps it is. But hang it all, it's as good as any; more comfortable than most, because I still like the theatre. [*Crockett re-enters at B. with a large tray on which is a "pinch" bottle of Scotch, a syphon, a bowl of ice and a small bottle of lithia tablets. He places them on the table, then withdraws at back.*]

TRAIN. Still contemplating the fateful mirage, eh?

PLACE [*moving over to the table followed by Train*]. Frankly, its outlines grow a little dim. Help yourself. [*Train pours himself a drink.*]

TRAIN. You'll never be happy till it disappears entirely.

PLACE [*drops a lithia tablet in his glass, then pours himself a drink*]. I wonder.

TRAIN. What's that you put in your glass?

PLACE [*rubbing his shoulders*]. Oh, just a little tablet. I wrenched my shoulder the other day, and it hurts me.

TRAIN [*picks up the bottle of tablets and reads*]. Five-grain lithia tablets. Yes, I know those wrenches. What were you doing, carrying a trunk upstairs?

PLACE. Damn it all, Langdon, let me fool myself a little longer, will you? Here's to you: may you never know the anguish of growing pains.

TRAIN. May you make a perfect recovery. [*They drink, then resume their seats.*]

PLACE. Oh, well, I'm nearly cured, nearly cured. The voyage over will put me on my feet.

TRAIN. Nothing like salt-air to dispel nonsense.

PLACE. Do you really think it's nonsense, old man?

TRAIN. Unmitigated.

PLACE. But isn't nonsense of the essence of youth, isn't it part and parcel of the whole wonderful, irrational, bewildering, beautiful thing?

TRAIN. It certainly is. But irrational would have described it well enough.

PLACE. *I* love nonsense.

TRAIN. You talk it.

PLACE. I love youth; I tell you, Langdon, I'm still young. My blood refuses to run temperately. I refuse to be guided by pitiless logic, cold reason, and thank God, I can still see visions.

TRAIN. See here, aren't you drinking too much coffee, and smoking too many black cigars?

PLACE [*comically*]. Oh hell! A tortured soul might as well throw itself on the mercies of a traffic policeman as cry aloud to you.

TRAIN. It's largely a matter of diet.

PLACE. Damn it, I have dieted; it's no use. I get hungry.

TRAIN. Remember, I warned you what would happen weeks ago, when you set out on that goose chase after the sacred fountain.

PLACE. But that is the wonderful, beatific thing, Langdon. I found it, actually found it; felt a little of the spray; and through the iridescent mist, for an instant, I saw eternal youth: lithe, pliant, joyful with moonbeams in her eyes.

TRAIN. Moonshine!

PLACE. I said moonbeams.

TRAIN. Did she bear any resemblance to — Alicia?

PLACE [*in a matter-of-fact voice*]. Not the slightest.

TRAIN. A false start, eh?

PLACE. Absolutely —

TRAIN. So the memory of Alicia is laid away in lavender and rosemary.

PLACE. No, it is laid away in coral-pink and mignonette.

TRAIN. And what about the water-nymph, the lady of the fountain?

PLACE [*quietly*]. She faded away.

TRAIN. I don't want to pry, intrude, but was there anything actual about her, anything corporeal? Or was she just one of your visions?

PLACE. Ah, my dear fellow, *she* had all the glamour, all the wonder of a vision come true. Why, she's been here in this room; she has sat where you sit now.

TRAIN. And you had as good a chance as that?

PLACE. As good as that: then caressing, deceitful fate tossed me aside. Do you remember the old fairy story of the Prince and the Pomegranates?

TRAIN. I don't remember fairy stories.

PLACE [*musingly*]. Of course, you wouldn't. Well, he was very careless, very careless indeed. But then he had another chance, and made up for his carelessness.

TRAIN. To be a little brutal, and at the risk of bruising your self-esteem, I don't believe you would ever have the slightest chance with a modern woman.

PLACE. Indeed!

TRAIN. My dear Gerald, the mode has changed since your time. They no longer want sentimental romanticists; one has got to go after 'em with a spiked bludgeon. It's a reversion. They want to be dragged by the hair into one's cave. They don't want rights; they want some wrongs and are going to have 'em, even if they have to vote for 'em.

PLACE. How very interesting! You don't believe then in the modern feminist movement?

TRAIN. You might as well ask me if I believe in the old anatomy.

PLACE. There's a comforting finality about that. [*The door at L. opens and Crockett looks in.*]

PLACE. What is it, Crockett?

CROCKETT [*a little confused*]. Nothing — nothing, sir; I beg pardon, sir. [*Withdraws and closes the door.*]

TRAIN [*getting up*]. Crockett has more sense than I have. He knows it's time to go to bed.

PLACE. What's the use of spoiling a nice little confab? Damn Crockett!

TRAIN [*looking at his watch*]. My dear man, it's going for twelve. Come back next year and try again. And remember, another time: *l'audace, toujours l'audace.*

PLACE. But it was an audacity even to think of her.

TRAIN. As long as you nurse that feeble humility you'll get nowhere — with women.

PLACE. Your counsels of perfection come too late.

TRAIN. You'll feel differently in six months.

PLACE. I'm fatalist enough to think that Chance knocks only once. Tomorrow I shall step aboard the good ship Middle Age, Captain Time in command, bound on a voyage to that "bourne from whence no traveller returns."

TRAIN. I shall be at the dock to wave you a fond adieu, and now I'm off.

PLACE. Oh, sit down!

TRAIN. Can't do it. Remember, I have other tortured souls to tend tomorrow.

PLACE. God have pity on them! Let Crockett order you a taxi.

TRAIN. No, it's only five or six blocks. The fresh air will do me good.

PLACE [*gets up, and they move slowly toward door at Back*]. Well, if you must.

TRAIN. That was a very charming Mrs. Lupin here tonight.

PLACE. Rather. Just the person for you, Langdon, — charming, gay, intelligent.

TRAIN. Oh, the likes of her wouldn't look at the likes of me.

PLACE. Well, as long as you nurse that feeble humility you'll get nowhere with women.

TRAIN. I suppose you think you're humorous.

PLACE. What I say is: *l'audace, toujours l'audace.* [*They pass out at B. laughing, closing the doors behind them. A few moments later the door at L. opens and Crockett enters, followed by Betty Crichton. She wears a long cloak, with heavy dark furs at the neck, against which her face shows with a lovely pallor.*]

BETTY. Thank you so much, Crockett.

CROCKETT. Mr. Place will be back in a moment. He just went to the door with Dr. Train.

BETTY [*moves over to chair near fire and sits*]. I hear you are going abroad, Crockett.

CROCKETT [*goes to table and picks up tray with glasses, etc.*]. We sail tomorrow.

BETTY. Isn't — isn't it rather sudden?

CROCKETT. Mr. Place does everything sudden, Miss.

BETTY. Oh!

[*Crockett withdraws quietly at R. She sits, with chin in palm, looking at the fire; so intently that she doesn't hear the door at Back open and Place enter. He moves down the room until about opposite where she is sitting, before she is conscious of his being in the room. She rises slowly, hesitantly, her cloak sliding from her shoulders, and stands before him, a very lovely thing, in coral pink silk, with a bunch of mignonette at her waist. He can scarce believe his senses, and makes a slight motion, as if to brush the mist from his eyes. Then a slight movement on her part tells him that it is a reality.*]

PLACE [*in a low voice*]. Miss Crichton!

BETTY [*hurriedly*]. I'm afraid I startled you. You were engaged when I came, and Crockett showed me into the drawing room. I tried to get you on the telephone about half-past seven, but the man said you had people to dinner. I left the opera early so as not to be too late, and — and my cousins are waiting for me outside.

PLACE. Oh, is that your car outside?

BETTY. My cousin's car.

PLACE. May I not ask them in?

BETTY. Oh, no! I came for a very simple matter, and it will take but a few moments.

PLACE [*moves over to a chair near her*]. Please sit down.

BETTY [*sits, as does Place, nearby*]. I have been out of town, and just got back this afternoon. I heard quite by chance that you were sailing tomorrow. That is the reason I've been so hurried, and came without warning.

PLACE. Yes, I am sailing tomorrow.

BETTY. It is about The Fountain of Youth. I didn't realize it had been such a success till I heard today.

PLACE. Splendid, isn't it?

BETTY. For Kenneth and Hilda, yes.

PLACE. I meant for them.

BETTY. But I find for the moment that it very awkwardly involves me.

PLACE. How do you mean?

BETTY. The manager, Healey, came to see me this afternoon.

PLACE. Yes.

BETTY. And offered me twenty-five thousand dollars, for what he chose to call my interest. *Twenty-five thousand dollars!*

PLACE [*wilfully misunderstanding*]. That's a lot of money — but if you feel that it is not enough, why —

BETTY. Not enough for what?

PLACE. Your interest.

BETTY. But I have no interest, none whatever. That is what the impossible Healey kept repeating — "Your interest, your interest, your interest," — until I could have smothered him in his own fur-lined overcoat.

PLACE. But you *had* an interest.

BETTY. I never had the slightest interest; never.

PLACE. Oh, but pardon me. Were you not one of the four incorporators of the Youth Company, that was organized with such a flourish?

BETTY. That was a joke — the merest jeu d'esprit.

PLACE. Yes, but like so many jokes it has turned out seriously.

BETTY. I refuse to recognise its seriousness, or be bound by it in any way.

PLACE. The mere fact that we are discussing it here tonight implies that you do recognise its seriousness, and, if you will allow me to say so, I hardly think that you are at liberty not to.

BETTY [*indignantly*]. Not at liberty to do as I please!

PLACE. Hardly.

BETTY. Do you mean to say that I can't get rid of this mythical interest?

PLACE. Do let me ask your cousins in.

BETTY [*snappishly*]. No; they are quite comfortable where they are.

PLACE. Of course, you can get rid of it. Didn't Healey offer to purchase it?

BETTY. For money! And I simply can't, and won't accept it from you — or — or from the Youth Company; and I must ask you to see that I shall not be annoyed by it.

PLACE. I regret that I am quite powerless.

BETTY. Why? How do you mean powerless?

PLACE. I have severed my connection with the Youth Company, disposed of my interests in it.

BETTY. But you are responsible for the disagreeable predicament in which I find myself; it was you who forced it on me.

PLACE. My dear Miss Crichton, isn't that a little — overstated? Wasn't it rather you who forced the situation on me?

BETTY. Mr. Place!

PLACE. Let me recall to you that it was at your suggestion — your eager suggestion — that I first became interested in the play. Knowing, as you did, that I was a sentimentalist, I have your word for it, it was of course then an easy matter to involve me in the destinies of a play which you had discovered, which you vouched for, which was at that time a matter of entirely your concern. Am I exaggerating any?

BETTY. Do you blame me?

PLACE [*instantly conscious of something in her voice that has not been there before*]. Blame you! You ask me if I blame you for the happiest weeks in my life — by all odds the happiest in my life?

BETTY. You confessed once that you had come looking for the fountain of youth, so it couldn't have been all my fault.

PLACE. Not confessed.

BETTY. I remember, you don't like confessions.

PLACE. That was another fountain of youth — a real one. You helped me to discover that one too.

BETTY [*getting up*]. Do you know I — I feel rather ashamed of myself, after what you've said. It makes me seem rather stupid — ungracious.

PLACE. No, no, no.

BETTY. Yes, and ungrateful, too. But I don't want to have any money from it; I'd rather not.

PLACE. Give it away, then; give it to some young fellow who is dreaming dreams and who finds the world a hard old world, for dreamers.

BETTY. May I? I should love to do that.

PLACE. See Guile, and tell him. He will help you.

BETTY [*picking up her cloak*]. And now I must go.

PLACE. Please, not just yet. I *wish* you would ask your cousins in, if — if only for a few moments. [*To himself in a whisper.*] *L'audace!*

BETTY. But why?

PLACE [*to himself*]. *Toujours l'audace!*

BETTY. What?

PLACE. Because I have something to tell them.

BETTY. Tell me.

PLACE. You'll be sure to carry the message — not to forget a word of it?

BETTY. But of course not.

PLACE. I want you to tell them that I am going away tomorrow, and that I am taking with me tied quite fast to memory, one who means more to me than life itself, one who has shown me what I've gone up and down the world to find out: that the Fountain of Youth is in one's own heart. Will you tell them that?

BETTY. I don't think they would understand; I don't understand.

PLACE. *Can't* you ask them to come in? I know *I* could explain to them.

BETTY. No, no; explain to me.

PLACE. It is something of a story

BETTY [*with just the shadow of a smile*]. A mystery tale?

PLACE. Yes. About a lady and a sentimentalist. He was stupid, like all sentimentalists; she, like all ladies, was kind. He mistook her kindness for something else.

BETTY [*in a low voice*]. Perhaps she mistook his stupidity for cleverness.

PLACE. Oh no: his dullness was quite obvious.

BETTY. Perhaps she fancied that he was trying to arrange something for her that was impossible.

PLACE. To arrange something for her? Oh, he was — and for himself. But she used your very word "impossible," and went away.

BETTY. Perhaps she was stupid too, perhaps too something of a sentimentalist.

PLACE. Oh, no, no, no! Women never are. I have authority for it.

BETTY. And is she the one who journeys with you, tied fast to memory?

PLACE. Yes.

BETTY. She doesn't deserve that it should be so.

PLACE. Her deserts are infinite.

BETTY. She should be very humble.

PLACE. Humility would not become her. Will you explain all this to your cousins?

BETTY. I can't.

PLACE. Can't? Why?

BETTY. Because there — there are no cousins.

PLACE. No cousins!

BETTY. Not out there. There is nothing out there but an empty car.

PLACE [*mystified*]. But — I don't understand.

BETTY. I was afraid to come alone. I — I invented the cousins.

PLACE. Afraid of me?

BETTY. No, of me. Will you take me home? [*He takes her yielding hands to his lips.*]

CURTAIN

FOOLS ERRANT

A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

NEW YORK: THE MAXINE ELLIOT THEATRE

MANAGERS: LEE SHUBERT AND LOUIS EVANS SHIPMAN

August 21, 1922

CHARACTERS

ERIC BRIERLY	Cyril Keightly
JAMES STANNARD	Fritz Williams
JOHN PRITCHARD	Vincent Serrano
DOCTOR GRAHAM	Robert Cummings
TOM CASSIDY	Charles Reigel
HENRY MALLOY	Arthur Fitzgerald
FANNY PRITCHARD	Lucile Watson
MRS. KINSEY ELTON	Tracy L'Engle
GRETA ELLIS	Alexandra Carlisle
ELLEN	Isabel Pell
MARY (Maid Servants)	Ruth Elaine
KATE	Bodil Rosing
SIMS, Man Servant	Gregory Loring

SCENARIO

ACT I

The drawing room in John Pritchard's house, New York.

ACT II

A parlour in Greta Ellis's apartment. New York.
Two months have elapsed.

ACT III

A room in Eric Brierly's house, Mesaba.
One year has elapsed.

ACT IV

The same. The same night.

TIME: *Today.*

ACT I

SCENE. *A handsome drawing-room in the house of John Pritchard, uptown, on the East Side, New York. There are doors at back, R. and L. The one at R. leading to the entry hall, and the one L. to the house. There is a large window down R. and down L. a large fireplace. The time is a late February afternoon, 1921. The curtains are drawn, lamps lighted, and a fire of coals burns in the fire-place.*

AT RISE. *Mrs. Kinsey Elton and James Stannard are discovered sitting down L. near the fire-place. Mrs. Elton is a smart, attractive woman of nearly forty; Stannard a charming, good-mannered man of forty-six. Both are smoking cigarettes.*

STANNARD. Any news, Molly?

MRS. ELTON. None; the town is dead. A few dull dinners, the opera, a bore and one's closest friends getting more hectic every day.

STANNARD. Over what?

MRS. ELTON. My dear, I can't keep up with them; it is something new over night. You have heard that Janet Brook has just started a school of advanced Bolshevism.

STANNARD. If Bolshevism advances much further Janet will find herself one of these days being auctioned off to the highest bidder.

MRS. ELTON. I fancy she'd rather like that. Somebody would *have* to take her then. She has the most beautiful young Slovak professor with the longest eyelashes who expounds adorable theories about taxes, love, property, and everything.

STANNARD. I suppose the idea is to make the United States habitable for everybody but Americans. Eh?

MRS. ELTON [*laughing*]. Yes, I imagine so. But there are so few Americans left, why shouldn't we adapt ourselves to the higher life that they wish to thrust upon us?

STANNARD. But high living is so expensive these days.

MRS. ELTON. Please, Jim, don't be sordid.

STANNARD. How are the children?

MRS. ELTON. Oh, doing splendidly. Gerald is at Groton, the only place one can send a gentleman's son these days.

STANNARD [*dryly*]. Yes, I understand the schools are rather mixed now; and going in for education and all that sort of thing.

MRS. ELTON. Cynthia is at an adorable place down South — I forgot the name — where they only have to study on rainy days.

STANNARD. Sounds admirable, if the climate is really dry.

MRS. ELTON. The court allows Tom and me each to have them for six months.

STANNARD. Nothing invidious about that.

MRS. ELTON. It means I have to pay all the bills. But on the whole the courts are very sympathetic and decent in their attitude.

STANNARD. I believe most of the judges are married.

MRS. ELTON. Do you know I think I could stand Tom for six months every year.

STANNARD. Why don't you compromise on that basis?

MRS. ELTON. No, thank you. If I had my life to live over again, I should be an enthusiastic advocate of trial marriages, but I'm too old to begin experimenting now.

STANNARD. Undoubtedly marriage is a crumbling institution. I am only waiting for them to establish the relation of the sexes on a permanently unpermanent basis, to have a shy at something myself.

MRS. ELTON. Oh, it's all very well for you to be flippant and cynical, Jim Stannard. You have that happy-go-lucky, cool temperament that has kept you out of all sorts of trouble. Here you are at forty, without ties, obligations, or regrets to look back upon —

STANNARD [*interrupting*]. Not much to look forward to either.

MRS. ELTON. Oh, that's a bad, delusive habit, looking forward: it should be suppressed in early youth. I really envy you.

STANNARD. That is the mildest of gratifications; the envy of others.

[*Sims, a man servant, has entered at Back L. with a large silver tray on which are tea things; he is followed by a smart, trim maid, carrying a silver tea-pot and a plate of thin sandwiches. Sims places the tray, and the maid the tea-pot and sandwiches on the table in front of the settee. The maid exits at Back L.*]

SIMS. Mrs. Pritchard will be down in a few minutes, Mrs. Elton, and asks if you will pour tea.

MRS. ELTON. Certainly, Sims.

SIMS. Thank you. [*He moves over to right, adjusts the curtains at the window, switches on the light in the unlighted lamps, and exits at Back L. — Mrs. Elton moves over and seats herself on the settee behind the table.*]

MRS. ELTON. Tea, Jim?

STANNARD. I suppose time and the place demand it.

MRS. ELTON. How?

STANNARD. Oh, strong, and everything —

[*Mrs. Elton pours the tea, and Stannard rises, moves over and sits near her, taking his cup of tea.*]

MRS. ELTON [*pouring tea for herself*]. Tell me, what is this gossip I hear about Jack Pritchard?

STANNARD. What is the gossip you hear about everybody?

MRS. ELTON [*over the brim of her cup*]. Usually fascinating.

STANNARD. A dash of rumour, a bit of malice, a pinch of truth; always to be taken, however, with a grain of salt.

MRS. ELTON. I've heard the rumour — and with a touch of malice; now give me the pinch of truth.

STANNARD. I don't know what you are talking about.

MRS. ELTON. Come, my dear, you might just as well tell me one time as another. If anyone knows, you do.

STANNARD. But no one knows.

MRS. ELTON. What?

STANNARD. Anything.

MRS. ELTON. Don't you suppose Fanny does?

STANNARD. I hope the busy gossips have let her alone.

MRS. ELTON. But there is a mysterious and discreet other household, I understand, eh?

STANNARD [*evasively*]. If there is, it is a mystery and wouldn't be very discreet.

MRS. ELTON [*impatiently*]. Oh, if you want to quibble, Jim — you all stand together, you men.

STANNARD [*laughing*]. Solidarity is the thing. Sex against sex — will be the campaign cry of the future.

MRS. ELTON. Don't be absurd.

STANNARD. I'm serious.

MRS. ELTON. You can't turn the edge of a woman's curiosity by trying to be funny. Not this woman's, anyhow.

STANNARD. I see it is hopeless to try to get away from you; what is it you are trying to find out?

MRS. ELTON. Whether it is true that Jack Pritchard has had the bad taste to desert Fanny for somebody else?

STANNARD [*reluctantly*]. He is interested in another woman.

MRS. ELTON. Humph! You prefer the insipid word interested to the disagreeable one, deserted?

STANNARD. I don't admit, my dear Molly, that one implies the other.

MRS. ELTON. You are straining at a gnat!

STANNARD. If so, it's because I have become accustomed to swallowing camels.

MRS. ELTON. Exactly. Tell me about this one.

STANNARD [*with a smile, hesitatingly*]. Well, she is a very unusual person.

MRS. ELTON. I know those unusual creatures. They are mostly led from the front row of the chorus by a gold chain attached to a diamond dog-collar.

STANNARD. Not the same, I assure you. A different sort altogether.

MRS. ELTON. You have met her, know her?

STANNARD. Yes.

MRS. ELTON. And do you consider that loyal to Fanny?

STANNARD. My loyalty is in no way concerned.

MRS. ELTON. Do you mean to say that in seeing, meeting this person, you are not tacitly backing up Jack Pritchard?

STANNARD. It doesn't do to cut oneself off from the vices and indiscretions of one's friends. I don't mean to share in them, but to keep in touch with them. You never know when you may be able to help a little.

MRS. ELTON. A complaisant code.

STANNARD. A human one.

MRS. ELTON. Well, I can't understand any such attitude.

STANNARD [*good-naturedly*]. Of course you can't, my dear Molly; along with all the enviable qualities of your sex you possess also its limitations. You are too personal in all your relations to life. To you, necessarily, a poor husband is a bad man. You are always clamouring for The Ideal.

MRS. ELTON [*snappishly*]. I'm not clamouring.

STANNARD. There you are striking the personal note immediately. When I said "you," I meant the more enlightened of your female contemporaries.

MRS. ELTON. Well, we don't clamour for poor husbands—

STANNARD. Of course not, your idea is rich ones.

MRS. ELTON. And please don't describe me as a female. It's impossible to talk to you.

STANNARD. Or listen?

MRS. ELTON. If I only had the opportunity. Now tell me, Jim, all about this wretched business.

STANNARD. Do you think your loyalty to Fanny could stand the strain?

MRS. ELTON. That's a very different matter.

[*Fanny Pritchard enters at Back and comes down L. to them. She is a handsome woman of thirty-six, well-bred, cultivated, with great personal charm, sympathetic, impulsive, yet with great dignity, but has a quick nervous restlessness and a certain superficiality that has been communicated by the little world of fashion that bounds her life. She kisses Mrs. Elton and shakes hands with Stannard, and then sits on the settee.*]

FANNY [*as she comes down*]. What an interminable time I've been! [*Kissing Molly.*] So glad you didn't wait, Molly. How are you, dear?

MRS. ELTON. We simply guzzled our tea while it was hot.

FANNY [*shaking hands with Stannard*]. How are you, Jim?

STANNARD. Fine, thanks. You?

FANNY. Never better. [*Sitting and pouring tea for herself.*] What were you two chattering about; I could hear you like a couple of magpies as I came downstairs.

STANNARD. It was a purely academic discussion: What relation has the divided skirt to the divided family?

MRS. ELTON. He has been perfectly idiotic, Fanny; don't listen to him.

FANNY [*smiling*]. Another cup of tea?

MRS. ELTON. A weak one. Two lumps, please.

FANNY [*pouring tea*]. Will you, Jim?

STANNARD. No, thanks. I must be running.

FANNY. You must be doing no such thing.

STANNARD. I really must. I just dropped in to bring you a message.

FANNY. A message?

STANNARD. Yes, from Eric Brierly.

FANNY [*with pleased surprise*]. No, have you seen Eric?

MRS. ELTON [*murmurs in surprise*]. Eric Brierly!

STANNARD [*in reply to Fanny*]. Yes, at luncheon, and he wanted me to tell you that he's coming in this afternoon.

FANNY. I'm so glad. Jack saw him yesterday at the club.

MRS. ELTON. Why I thought Eric Brierly had become merely a legend; that he was killed in the war or lost out in Kamchatka, or somewhere.

STANNARD. He's just back.

FANNY. Changed much, Jim?

STANNARD. Not outwardly.

FANNY. How then?

STANNARD. Oh, there are things going on inside him.

FANNY. Inside him?

MRS. ELTON. Stomach trouble?

STANNARD [*smiling*]. No, I mean mentally — and shall I say spiritually?

MRS. ELTON. No, don't say spiritually; you don't know what it means.

STANNARD. I accept the correction.

FANNY [*comically*]. Please; you two. [*To Stannard.*] What do you mean, Jim?

STANNARD. He's become a sort of missionary way off up North. He's living amongst a lot of miners on a property I am very much interested in. You knew all about it, didn't you?

FANNY. Only vaguely. He never writes to either Jack or me. And you know he's been away for over two years. We haven't seen him since he came back from France.

MRS. ELTON. I thought missionaries were queer people with whiskers, for whom Sunday-School children subscribed money, so that they could go away, and stay away.

FANNY. If Eric has turned missionary, you may be sure he's not the common or garden kind.

MRS. ELTON. Was he in the Army?

STANNARD. Not ours. He was lacking in the pride that buoyed up the rest of us, and joined the Foreign Legion in 1914.

MRS. ELTON. As a private?

STANNARD. Yes. Eric likes to fight. He came out after Verdun with the Legion of Honour, a Croix de Guerre with palm, and a smashed leg that brought him home.

MRS. ELTON. I never knew him very well, but I can remember him ten years ago, a long, lean, active, eager fellow, and very handsome.

STANNARD. He is still good looking — and eager.

MRS. ELTON. What set him chasing wind-mills?

FANNY. What is it tosses every one of us hither and thither?

MRS. ELTON. Hither is all very well, Fanny, but there is no excuse for thither, if you're well born, got a place amongst nice people, and money enough to keep you going. He has money, hasn't he?

STANNARD. Lots of it. An old uncle provided very handsomely for him. But Eric always had a curious streak; believed in principles, duties, obligations and other queer things that have faded quite out of our little world, Molly.

MRS. ELTON. Do you think he's found them out there in the tall timber?

FANNY. If he hasn't found them, he's made them.

STANNARD [*getting up*]. He has indeed.

FANNY. Must you?

STANNARD. Yes. [*Shaking her hand.*] Good-bye, Fanny. Remember me to Jack, and tell Eric if he turns up that I delivered his message.

FANNY. I will.

STANNARD. Good-bye, Molly.

MRS. ELTON. Good-bye, Jim. Do run in to see me soon.

STANNARD. Very soon.

MRS. ELTON. Any time when you are in an agreeable humour. [*Stannard exits at Back. She takes a cigarette from a box on the table and lights it.*] I am afraid from all accounts your friend Eric Brierly has turned into an amiable dreamer, Fanny.

FANNY. Not a very sympathetic occupation from our New York point of view, eh?

MRS. ELTON [*impatiently*]. Oh, come, my dear. You can't tell me that you stand for the sort of foolishness that he has gone in for.

FANNY. What do you mean?

MRS. ELTON. The preacher-in-the-wilderness sort of thing. All that is implied by his turning his back on civilization and taking up his life amongst a gang of brutalized miners.

FANNY. Of course it is quaint and ridiculous, Molly; but I understand it — at least sometimes I do. I often feel myself as if I'd like to walk out the front door, jump in a taxicab, and tell it never to stop until — [*She hesitates.*]

MRS. ELTON. Until what?

FANNY. Oh, until I had reached a wilderness.

MRS. ELTON [*quizzically*]. Eric Brierly's wilderness?

FANNY. Perhaps.

MRS. ELTON [*gaily*]. What! My luxury-loving, fastidious Fanny?

FANNY. If we are fastidious, it is on the easiest of terms.

MRS. ELTON. Hm! You wouldn't think so if you could see the bills flutter about me the first of every month.

FANNY. The account of our follies has never been rendered yet, but when it is there will be a stiff reckoning.

MRS. ELTON. Oh, well, sufficient unto the day; don't let's borrow trouble. Life is what you find it.

FANNY. I remember someone told me once that Life is what you make it!

MRS. ELTON. Sounds like Eric Brierly.

FANNY. It was.

MRS. ELTON. I hate people who always have a maxim on the tip of their tongues. What a bore he must really be!

FANNY. He never was that.

MRS. ELTON. Wasn't he just a little bit smitten in your direction, once upon a time, Fanny?

FANNY. He asked me to marry him.

MRS. ELTON [*not showing surprise*]. Of course no man is a bore who goes as far as that; though evidently the proposition didn't interest you. Didn't you care for him?

FANNY. I thought I cared for other things, more.

MRS. ELTON. What other things?

FANNY. The things that Jack represents, the things that you and I, Molly, and all our selfish little world can't do without — cheap ambitions, feeble gaieties.

MRS. ELTON [*unsympathetically*]. Humph!

FANNY. And I know deep down in me that if I had the chance again I'd make the meaner choice.

MRS. ELTON [*dryly*]. Well, you are quite right. The day for marrying missionaries has gone by.

[*The door at Back opens and Jack Pritchard enters. He is a man of forty, with the comfortable look that comes from self-indulgence. He is good-looking and has much charm and personal force. He is dressed in dark blue clothes — double-breasted jacket. He stands at the door as if waiting for someone to follow him in.*]

PRITCHARD. Helloa, Molly, how are you?

MRS. ELTON. How are you, Jack?

PRITCHARD [*to Fanny*]. But you can't guess who's with me, Fanny.

FANNY [*expectantly, rising*]. Is it Eric?

PRITCHARD [*calling through the door*]. Come on in, Eric; somebody has spoiled our surprise.

FANNY. Jim Stannard was here.

PRITCHARD [*good-naturedly*]. The busybody.

[*Eric Brierly enters. He is a man around forty, but looks younger, — slender, with the grace of a man*

in fittest physical condition, his handsome, kindly face browned from exposure to weather. A firm jaw shows his character and fighting force, while his ease, poise and quizzical smile denote his experience in the world. Fanny goes to meet him as they both shake hands with the greatest cordiality.]

FANNY. I am so glad to see you, Eric.

BRIERLY. How are you, Fanny? Stannard brought my message, did he?

FANNY. Yes. [*As they move toward the settee.*] You know Mrs. Elton, Eric?

MRS. ELTON. I don't wonder you've forgotten me; it's a good many years since I saw you last.

BRIERLY. Of course, I remember perfectly. Newport in 1910.

PRITCHARD. How's that for a memory?

[*Sims enters from upper R. with a large silver hot water pot; he places it on the tray, removes the one that is there, and exits quietly.*]

FANNY. I can hardly believe my eyes, Eric.

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. Don't tell me I'm getting an old man.

FANNY [*pouring tea*]. Oh no, not that! I mean the fact that you are here. [*To Pritchard.*] Tea, Jack?

PRITCHARD. Yes, please.

BRIERLY. Oh, that's a dream. I don't believe it myself. I'll wake up one of these fine mornings and find myself back in my Minnesota shack.

FANNY. You are not going back to that?

BRIERLY. Oh, not for a while.

FANNY. I mean at all.

BRIERLY [*taking his cup of tea*]. My dear Fanny, you don't know what I've found out there.

FANNY. Not gold?

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. Something more precious than gold.

PRITCHARD [*taking his tea, standing as he sips it, near by*]. Listen to the alchemist.

FANNY. What was it?

BRIERLY. I found myself — [*Laughing, to Pritchard.*] The egoist, not the alchemist speaks.

MRS. ELTON [*comically*]. What a horrible discovery!

BRIERLY. You've no idea what a distressing revelation it is — at first, Mrs. Elton.

FANNY. How do you mean you found yourself?

BRIERLY. Oh, it's a long story — have pity on Mrs. Elton and Jack here, who has heard it.

PRITCHARD. Don't mind me. You've given me no details.

MRS. ELTON. If you don't let me hear, I shall behave very badly.

BRIERLY. You are all very flattering.

FANNY. You haven't the complacency to think that you could drop completely out of our lives without arousing just a little — curiosity, have you?

PRITCHARD. You have treated us rather shabbily, you know.

BRIERLY. It wasn't complacency.

FANNY. What then?

BRIERLY. The very reverse. I never imagined that a drop of water out of the mill-race would be missed.

PRITCHARD. Oh, you've been missed all right, Eric.

FANNY. And what's more; to administer to your pride a little, your place has been kept for you.

BRIERLY [*ironically*]. Place? Did I ever have a place in this maelstrom?

PRITCHARD. You can't escape that sort of thing by just going away, you know.

BRIERLY. You're right; it's a matter of breaking away from all sorts of absurd, intangible things.

FANNY. And you've done it?

BRIERLY. Absolutely.

FANNY. How?

BRIERLY. Did you ever hear of the Mesaba Mountains, Mrs. Elton?

MRS. ELTON. Never.

FANNY. Nor I.

PRITCHARD. What an absurd question to ask a New York woman, who has had only the disadvantages of a modern education.

BRIERLY. Nobody east of Pittsburgh ever has. Well, they are way up in the Lake Superior country, north of Duluth. Know where Duluth is? [*Smiling.*]

FANNY. Faintly.

BRIERLY. Well, no matter; it's a good ways off anyhow. Two years ago after I came back from France, I was up in that country on a shooting trip and I dropped in to a little town called Mesaba right in the middle of the wilderness. It's the finest iron country in the world, and as I had some interests there, I had more than the sight-seer's interest in the operation of the property. Am I boring you all?

FANNY. No, no, tell us everything.

PRITCHARD. Go on.

BRIERLY. It was in that hideous mean little dreary mining town that I came face to face with myself. Rather a curious sensation, you know, meeting one's self for the first time.

PRITCHARD [*puzzled*]. How do you mean?

BRIERLY. I mean that confronted there as I was with elemental man and his women and children, struggling, sweating, striving with none of the glamour or inspiration that belongs to a labour loved —

PRITCHARD [*interrupting*]. Foreigners, weren't they?

BRIERLY [*sardonically*]. Yes, some of them; but almost human in spite of that. Big creatures that looked like men, females that must have once resembled women, and little things that had the outward

semblance of children; all stamped with the ugly marks of over-toil, mean hopes, desperate fears and bitter, squalid lives, think of it, were working for what?

PRITCHARD. Their bread and butter, I suppose.

BRIERLY. For their bread — and my butter: my idleness, my luxury paid for by their twisted lives.

MRS. ELTON. Isn't that a little far fetched?

BRIERLY [*seriously*]. There isn't a missing link in the chain that connects us with the misery of those people. It was the realization of that, that gave me a speaking acquaintance with myself.

PRITCHARD. And straightway you marched off and became a social sentimentalist, eh?

BRIERLY. I suppose that describes it as well as anything. I am not a philosopher or a political economist.

PRITCHARD. And what have you accomplished?

BRIERLY. Oh, sometimes I think not very much. The children have a chance to go to school; the women have become a little more conscious of their sex; and the men, too.

FANNY. And you've done it all yourself, Eric?

BRIERLY. I've had lots of help. I pricked the conscience of the company after a while — with the help of Jim Stannard — and they've backed me splendidly. But the thing is only just begun; I've only scratched the surface.

MRS. ELTON [*rising slowly, giving the indication that she is about to leave. Brierly and Pritchard rise also*]. But how could you fancy that your obligation, if there was any, belonged to this particular group of overworked, underfed miners?

BRIERLY. We mustn't subject our obligations to too delicate an analysis. If we do they are apt to fade away during the process.

MRS. ELTON. Ah, if I could only be sure of that, you have no idea with what delicacy I would analyze them! [*Pritchard laughs out, and Brierly smiles, good-naturedly.*]

FANNY. Molly, you are incorrigible!

MRS. ELTON. Mr. Brierly understands.

BRIERLY. Oh, yes, I understand.

MRS. ELTON. You will come to see me one day, won't you — and tell me more.

BRIERLY. I shall be delighted to.

MRS. ELTON [*bending over Fanny and kissing her lightly*]. Good-bye, dear. Please don't get up. [*Whispering.*] He is the handsomest man I have ever seen.

FANNY. Good-bye. [*Mrs. Elton moves up back, followed by Pritchard.*]

MRS. ELTON. Oh, don't come out, Jack.

PRITCHARD. I've got to telephone. Don't you run off, Eric.

BRIERLY. I shan't.

[*Mrs. Elton blows a kiss to Fanny, nods smilingly to Brierly, and exits at Back R. followed by Pritchard. Brierly sits again near Fanny.*]

FANNY. It is all very wonderful, Eric; but it depresses me desperately.

BRIERLY. I knew I was giving you too much autobiography.

FANNY. It's not that, you know; it is because it makes my own life seem such an empty thing.

BRIERLY. But I want you to do some of the talking now, Fanny; I want to hear all about you.

FANNY. I want you to know, Eric — There is so much I want you to know. [*She looks away from him, and picks at the cushion covering. Then in a low voice.*] I'm — I'm not very happy, Eric.

BRIERLY [*gently, but with great kindliness*]. Not happy! My, my, what a complaint that is of these middle years of ours!

FANNY. I may have no right to be; I may have forfeited it, but still I am hungry for it.

BRIERLY. Ah, we are all ravenous for happiness, and hunt for it in such out of the way places.

FANNY. It isn't queer to look for it at home, is it?

BRIERLY [*hesitatingly*]. What is it? You and Jack?

FANNY. Yes. Things are not going very straight. You may think it very queer, Eric, my speaking to you of all people about it, but I can't keep it any longer

BRIERLY. My dear Fanny, think it queer? What's old frienship worth, what is it for, if not to lean on?

FANNY. I have no one else who could understand, who could help me.

BRIERLY. How about talking it over with Jack himself?

FANNY [*shaking her head*]. Oh, it's beyond that! You'll see when I tell you.

BRIERLY. I hate to think of your being hurt, being troubled. I wanted yours always to be the primrose way.

FANNY. And so it was — until the thing happened.

BRIERLY. What?

FANNY. His infatuation for — for someone else. [*She sees in his face that he has heard of it.*] You have heard?

BRIERLY. Very little.

FANNY. I wouldn't care — I don't care for myself, but it is the hideous consequence for him, the children. It has been going on now for over a year; everybody is talking about it, and I am utterly helpless. I don't know what to do.

BRIERLY. Does he know that you know?

FANNY [*a little wildly*]. He either doesn't know or doesn't care. I haven't breathed it to a soul, Eric, until now, not to a living soul, and I never could have spoken to anyone but you. Can't you help me?

BRIERLY. We'll think it out together. There never was a problem like this that couldn't be solved one way or another.

FANNY. I've tried to see the whole thing with my mind, not with my nerves.

BRIERLY. Who is the woman?

FANNY. I don't know who she is; no one that anyone could know. That's what makes the fight seem so hopeless. If I could come out into the open and measure my strength and wits against hers, I wouldn't cry over failure. But it is having to sit unable to move, powerless, that unnerves me.

BRIERLY. Have you ever seen her?

FANNY. Once, by an unlucky chance, at the theatre with him. I fled as if I had been the guilty one; he never knew.

BRIERLY. What sort of a person was she?

FANNY. I watched her for a few moments from behind the curtain of my box. I could never forget her. A tragic, discontented face.

BRIERLY. That's something. I was afraid it might have been the other kind.

FANNY. I couldn't place her. She might have been almost anything — except the kind of person one would have expected her to be; even a lady.

BRIERLY. I'm afraid you are over-subtle, Fanny; I can't even tell *them* nowadays.

FANNY. You know what I mean, Eric.

BRIERLY. I know, but the world has been so mauled about, that, like gentlemen, it has lost all its flavour.

FANNY. I know.

BRIERLY. I think anyhow that the age of men and women is at hand, that of ladies and gentlemen on the wane. It is something I've learned out there in the mountains.

FANNY. Do you think you have learned anything out there that will help me?

BRIERLY. Yes.

FANNY. What?

BRIERLY. Patience, tolerance!

FANNY. You don't ask me to tolerate this thing?

BRIERLY. Only as one would tolerate a weakness — a mistake, in anyone one cared for.

FANNY. It is not a question of caring any longer. And I have been patient, hoping against hope. What to do, what to do though! That's what pounds in my head day in and day out, until everything goes black.

BRIERLY. I'd give my life to help you, Fanny. You know that, don't you?

FANNY. Yes, I know. But oh, the whole thing is horrible! It is going on all about us, every day; unhappy women, discontented men. What's it all mean?

BRIERLY. It means a social life without standards or tradition; men and women without ideals. It means too much money, too few obligations, too little restraint. Do you think Jack would be in this predicament, if his father had spent more time training his son, and less in piling up his dollars? Jack is not vicious, he's only weak; the luxury and artificial life which surround him here in New York have weakened his fibre; he's morally out of training.

FANNY. Does that explain all unhappy marriages?

BRIERLY. It doesn't have to explain them all. It explains yours, and it is not too late to mend.

FANNY. What can you do?

BRIERLY. Have a talk with — Jack first.

FANNY. He'd know I'd spoken to you.

BRIERLY. Trust me, Fanny, to avoid the crudity of that. Then I'll see the woman. She is the key to the whole situation.

FANNY. Oh, if you can get her away from him! I know it's nothing but the moment's folly.

BRIERLY. We'll save him yet.

FANNY. What could he have seen in the creature!

BRIERLY. There is nothing so inexplicable as the attachment between any particular man and any particular woman.

FANNY. He has sacrificed everything that you would think meant most to him: me, the children, his friends.

BRIERLY [*reassuringly*]. Good courage now. Remember wives and friends have often confronted this sort of thing before. And you know I am not used to being beaten.

FANNY. I can never hope to repay you for the new hope you give me.

BRIERLY. Were I to accomplish miracles, the debt would still be in your favour, Fanny.

FANNY. How do you mean?

BRIERLY. Do you know to whom more than anyone else I owe the inspiration for my life out there among those dreary outcasts?

FANNY [*in a low voice*]. No.

BRIERLY. To you.

FANNY. I'm not worthy of it.

BRIERLY [*with great feeling*]. Don't say that. We are every one of us worthy of the best we inspire — and that's one of the big responsibilities we all have; to inspire nothing but the best. Life is a stumbling matter, anyhow, and you and I are getting old enough to moralize a little and philosophize about it. You've helped me. I've held my head a little higher, planted my feet a little more firmly because I've known you.

FANNY [*lowering her eyes*]. That's much to say; it makes me prouder than I can tell you. [*Pritchard re-enters from back R. and comes down to them.*]

PRITCHARD. I've been trying to talk to Philadelphia on "long distance"; I thought I'd never get the connection.

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. We haven't missed you a minute. I've been talking this dear lady to death.

PRITCHARD [*lighting a cigarette*]. It takes a good deal of talk to fill in a gap of two years. It's my turn now.

BRIERLY. I am ready for you.

FANNY. Won't you dine with us, Eric?

BRIERLY. Impossible, my dear Fanny, tonight; but ask me again soon. [*Sims appears at door Back.*]

SIMS. Nurse says the children are waiting for you in the nursery, ma'am.

FANNY. I'll go right up, Sims.

SIMS. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits.*]

FANNY [*rising*]. You'll excuse me, Eric?

BRIERLY [*rising*]. Of course. And I really must be off in a moment. [*He shakes hands with Fanny.*]

PRITCHARD [*looking at his watch*]. Nonsense, it's only six o'clock.

FANNY. Let us see as much of you as you can, Eric.

BRIERLY. Yes, indeed.

FANNY. Are you dining home tonight, Jack?

PRITCHARD. No, I am going out. [*Fanny exits at Back L.*] You don't really mean that you ever expect to go back out there to that God-forsaken hole?

BRIERLY [*lighting a cigarette*]. That's what I really mean. Why not?

PRITCHARD. Eric, there's nothing in it.

BRIERLY. How do you mean — nothing in it?

PRITCHARD. Oh, it's a quixotic adventure that will lead to nothing.

BRIERLY. Don't you call personal satisfaction anything?

PRITCHARD [*impatiently*]. Personal satisfaction! Why, a fellow with your money and ability could do anything he wanted.

BRIERLY [*imperturbably*]. That was my selfish idea — and I'm doing it.

PRITCHARD. This back-parlour socialist business makes me tired.

BRIERLY [*laughing*]. My socialism might, but my back-parlour wouldn't. I haven't any. You've got more money and more ability — as you call it — than I, and I suppose you are doing what you want to do; are you happier than I?

PRITCHARD. Happier? What the devil has happiness got to do with it?

BRIERLY. I suppose, if you come to think of it, that the ultimate desire of every man, woman and child in the world, is happiness of one sort or another.

PRITCHARD. There are precious few of us that have that ultimate desire satisfied here in New York.

BRIERLY. That's because you and your crowd eat too much, drink too much, spend too much, while your fellow-townsmen, herded into tenements that would disgrace Constantinople, eat too little and don't have anything to spend at all.

PRITCHARD. There you go with your blooming socialism.

BRIERLY. That isn't socialism; that's human sense.

PRITCHARD. I know you fellows have a wild idea about dividing everything, confiscating property and all that poppy-cock.

BRIERLY. No, we only want to confiscate poverty, destroy misery; and instead of only a few enjoying themselves, let everybody have a good time.

PRITCHARD [*laughing*]. Eric, you are on a long road; you will be telling me you believe in free love next.

BRIERLY. The freer the better. Why not? What's love worth if it isn't free — or anything else for that matter?

PRITCHARD. Do you really mean that?

BRIERLY. Mean it? — of course I mean it. You and I might differ slightly on a definition of freedom, or even of love, for every man has his own private conception of both.

PRITCHARD. Aren't you becoming something of what the churchmen call a latitudinarian?

BRIERLY [*banteringly*]. When you live as far North as I do, a little thing like latitude doesn't count.

PRITCHARD [*laughs; then with just a shade of hesitancy*]. Do you know, Eric, I have a great friend I want you to know; a really extraordinary woman. I think she would be interested in some of your preposterous ideas.

BRIERLY [*casually*]. A friend of Fanny's?

PRITCHARD [*giving him a queer, sharp look, but reassured by the look of vague interest in Brierly's face*]. No. She hasn't many friends, but she's extremely clever and attractive.

BRIERLY. Who is she?

PRITCHARD. Her name is Greta Ellis.

BRIERLY. Greta Ellis? Who is Greta Ellis? Where's she from? What's her natural history?

PRITCHARD. Oh, it is a very natural history. When Fanny and I were in Paris a year ago, I ran across her one afternoon in Allerton's studio; some sort of a function. She was singing a plaintive little French song, way over in a corner, standing by a piano and — [*Hesitating.*]

BRIERLY. What?

PRITCHARD. Well, it didn't take me long to find out about her. She had been over there for a couple of years trying to break into the Conservatoire but just wasn't good enough. She was up against it good and hard. Money all gone, and trying to support herself giving music lessons for two or three francs an hour. The whole thing was pitiful.

BRIERLY. And pitiful combined with beautiful was irresistible, eh?

PRITCHARD. I got her to chuck the whole thing and come over here.

BRIERLY. What for?

PRITCHARD. So that I could help her along.

BRIERLY. Which way? Music lessons?

PRITCHARD. Damn music lessons. She has a very comfortable apartment and doesn't have to worry about money matters.

BRIERLY. Oh, that way?

PRITCHARD. What's the matter with — that way?

BRIERLY [*hesitating*]. Well —

PRITCHARD. Well, what?

BRIERLY. Doesn't it rather complicate one's ordinary social relations?

PRITCHARD. How do you mean, complicate them?

BRIERLY. We all know from the accumulated experience of the ages that it is impossible for three or more hearts to beat as one — that is, east of Salt Lake City.

PRITCHARD. You are not going to talk morality?

BRIERLY [*lightly*]. Never. The subject is obsolete.

PRITCHARD. Man is not a monogamous animal.

BRIERLY. Certainly not a very successful one. But is that a new discovery?

PRITCHARD. Hardly. It has biblical authority.

BRIERLY [*good-humouredly*]. Ah, the Bible is a book of very large sanctions —

PRITCHARD. Well, modern life needs large sanctions. [*Briefly laughs.*] What are you laughing at?

BRIERLY. Oh, at you and your sanctions. Ever hear of the devil quoting the scriptures?

PRITCHARD. Don't be so darned narrow.

BRIERLY. A few moments ago you accused me of being a latitudinarian.

PRITCHARD. You're broad enough when it suits *your* purposes.

BRIERLY [*getting up*]. Well, I'll suspend judgment till I've seen Greta Ellis.

PRITCHARD. Will you come with me to see her?

BRIERLY. Yes, if I'm invited.

PRITCHARD. When?

BRIERLY. Tomorrow.

PRITCHARD. Very well, it's on. I'll meet you at the club about four, and we'll go. [*They start to move slowly toward door at Back.*] I know you'll like her.

BRIERLY. Do you think I could make a convert?

PRITCHARD. To what?

BRIERLY. All sorts of things.

PRITCHARD. Maybe.

BRIERLY. I warn you I shall try.

PRITCHARD [*laughing*]. Go ahead; I give you a free hand. [*They exit at back R. talking.*]

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. *A living room in the apartment of Greta Ellis. A light, gay, luxurious room. A door at R., a door at L. Windows at back. A low sofa down Right. A writing desk at back between the windows on which stands a telephone. A table at L. on which is a lamp, books, papers, cigarettes, etc. The time is about seven o'clock in the evening, two months after the time of the preceding act.*

AT RISE. *Stannard is discovered sitting by the fire. A moment after the door at R. opens and Greta Ellis enters. She is a woman of thirty, handsome, simple, direct, sincere; she has a look of weariness and discontent, the outward sign of the inward revolt against her irregular life with Pritchard. She wears a handsome evening gown. Stannard turns and comes to her as he hears the door close.*

GRETA [*pleasantly*]. Helloa, Jim, all alone?

STANNARD [*rising*]. How are you? [*Shaking hands.*]

GRETA. It's too bad to have kept you waiting so long.

STANNARD. I haven't been waiting at all. I'm dining at the club and just dropped in to say howd'ye do.

GRETA. I am so glad you did. I've had rather a beastly day.

STANNARD. Busy?

GRETA. No, doing nothing.

STANNARD. Hardest thing to do in the world.

GRETA. Yes, it's hopeless.

STANNARD. Better than having too much to do, don't you think?

GRETA. Not for me. [*With suppressed feeling.*] Idleness is killing me. It gives one too much time to think.

STANNARD [*lightly steering the conversation away from disagreeable ground*]. Seen Brierly lately?

GRETA. Yes, he was in yesterday.

STANNARD. Extraordinary chap, isn't he?

GRETA. Very. I — I don't think I understand him.

STANNARD [*laughing*]. He's an enigma to everyone.

GRETA. Jack says he's crazy.

STANNARD. Mad as March hare.

GRETA. Don't you trust him?

STANNARD. Trust him? He's about the only man I know that I would trust. He is honest, he speaks the truth and does to others as he wishes to be done by. As the world wags now, isn't that sheer lunacy?

GRETA. He *is* very different.

STANNARD. He's very fine.

GRETA. And you believe in him?

STANNARD. Of course, I believe in him, although it makes me most uncomfortable.

GRETA. Why?

STANNARD. Oh, it's always disquieting to see another fellow doing the things you believe in. It's no fun having your own shortcomings spread before you.

GRETA. No, that's no fun. I often wonder how or why he finds time to come to see me.

STANNARD. Oh, he's the friendliest fellow in the world; he likes everybody. [*Realizing that his remark is not quite right.*] I — I don't mean for a moment that he's not discriminating.

GRETA [*smiling*]. You mean that he's unprejudiced.

STANNARD [*at a loss*]. Well —

GRETA. He would have to be, wouldn't he — to be a visitor here?

STANNARD. Why do you say that?

GRETA. Because even men have their prejudices about women like me.

STANNARD [*uncomfortably, looking away from her*]. I know it must be very hard for you at times.

GRETA [*flashing at him*]. At times! [*She turns away to hide her feelings. After a moment she turns to him again.*] Will you tell me something?

STANNARD. Anything that I know — and may.

GRETA. I don't want you to think it is mere inquisitiveness.

STANNARD. Oh, I'll not think that. What is it?

GRETA [*with hesitation*]. Was Eric Brierly ever in love with Mrs. Pritchard?

STANNARD [*laughing*]. That *is* a question. Brierly doesn't wear his heart on his sleeve, you know.

GRETA. You are trying to evade.

STANNARD. No, I am not trying to evade; I really don't know.

GRETA. What do you think?

STANNARD. Brierly has always been a close friend of Mrs. Pritchard's and Jack's, before they were married and since — I know he has a warm affection for them both.

GRETA. But you've heard —

STANNARD [*interrupting*]. My dear Greta, you can hear anything in the world if you wish to listen. I've heard what you've heard — irresponsible tattle.

GRETA. And you think nothing of that?

STANNARD. Nothing. Eric Brierly is a fair mark for it. He's an eccentric figure, who thinks for himself and does as he pleases. Naturally he makes fine food for talk.

GRETA. Your explanation is too elaborate.

STANNARD. It doesn't appeal to you? [*She shakes her head, with a smile.*] Well, perhaps you have firmer ground than I to stand on.

GRETA. Perhaps. [*The door at L. opens and Pritchard enters. He has the air of being perfectly at home.*]

PRITCHARD. How are you, Jim; thought I might find you here. Helloa, Greta. [*She nods with just the shadow of a smile.*]

STANNARD. Only dropped in to say, "How do you do" — and get my hands warm.

PRITCHARD. It is raw. Been out today, Greta?

GRETA. Yes.

PRITCHARD. Shopping?

GRETA. No, just loitering.

PRITCHARD. Nothing to do?

GRETA. Nothing.

PRITCHARD. Hear that, Jim: nothing to do?

STANNARD. From the point of view of an overworked attorney that sounds good to me.

PRITCHARD. You don't expect us to squeeze a tear for the overworked legal profession.

STANDARD [*laughing*]. Not a tear exactly, but a kind word on occasion. [*Moving to go.*] Be in at the club later, Jack?

PRITCHARD. I think so.

GRETA. You're not going?

STANNARD. Yes, I've said how do you do, and my hands are warm again. [*Shaking hands with her.*] Good-bye, and thank you.

GRETA. Good-bye.

PRITCHARD [*walking with him toward the door*]. Anything new?

STANNARD. Not a thing. The market is way off.

PRITCHARD [*as they pass out together*]. Likely to be worse before it's better. [*Greta moves aimlessly up and down. The other door is heard to close and a moment after Pritchard re-enters.*] Let's dine out somewhere tonight and go to the theatre afterward, Greta. What do you say?

GRETA. I don't feel very much like it, and besides, Mr. Brierly said he was coming to dinner.

PRITCHARD. It seems to me that Brierly is a pretty regular visitor these days.

GRETA. You introduced him here; tell him if you wish him to stop coming. I don't imagine it would disconcert him much.

PRITCHARD. How about you?

GRETA. He's the most interesting man I've ever known.

PRITCHARD. You haven't known many.

GRETA. Enough.

PRITCHARD [*impatiently*]. What's the matter with you, Greta? You haven't been yourself for a month past.

GRETA. I haven't been myself for a year past.

PRITCHARD. You mean ever since —

GRETA. I mean ever since you transferred me to this. [*With a sweep of her hand around the room.*]

PRITCHARD. What's the matter with this?

GRETA. It's getting to be intolerable.

PRITCHARD. What?

GRETA. Oh, the whole thing. Our stealthy dinners and suppers at restaurants just off the beaten track, our aimless evenings at moving picture shows and cabarets. The night rides in the automobile; everything at night, everything surreptitious, everything touched with the terror of being recognized by respectable people.

PRITCHARD. What the devil do you care for respectable people?

GRETA. It isn't I that care, it's you.

PRITCHARD. I don't care a damn.

GRETA. Don't fool yourself, Jack. *Everything* you do is an admission that you do care!

PRITCHARD. What do you mean?

GRETA. Why are you known here by a name not your own? Why are your comings and goings secret? Why, when you are with me, do you shun the people you know?

PRITCHARD. Well, because —

GRETA. Because you care more about being respectable than you do about the truth.

PRITCHARD. Oh, nonsense. There are certain things one can't do.

GRETA. Openly.

PRITCHARD [*impatiently*]. What the devil is the use of going into all this?

GRETA. Just to explain why my situation — position — whatever you wish to call it — is becoming intolerable.

PRITCHARD. Is it any harder to bear than the drudgery I took you from, with your spare time spent in a stale hall bedroom?

GRETA [*after a moment, burying her face in her hands*]. What a horrible thing it is to be a coward!

PRITCHARD. Oh, come, Greta, be sensible — what's the use of working yourself up over a lot of things that are dead and buried?

GRETA. Buried but not dead. It's an agony to have them calling to me as they do.

PRITCHARD. What do you mean?

GRETA. I mean the things that were good — that I hadn't the courage to hold to.

PRITCHARD. Your miserable existence in a squalid French boarding-house trying to keep body and soul together on five dollars a week? Is that the cause of these bitter regrets?

GRETA. It is easier to keep body and soul together on five dollars a week, than five hundred. I've found

that out. I did have hopes, faith, courage in those days, but they have left me, all gone, and what have I in their place?

PRITCHARD. See here, Greta, what you want is some open air — some exercise. I'll ship a couple of ponies down to Virginia next week, and we will run down there and gallop around a bit. It will make a new girl of you.

GRETA. Oh, can't you see, can't you understand, it isn't more things I want: it isn't fresh air and exercise I need at the end of a chain.

PRITCHARD. At the end of a chain?

GRETA. Jack, I want my freedom.

PRITCHARD. You want to quit?

GRETA. I want to quit.

PRITCHARD. Do you mean that after all I've done for you, given you — that you want to throw me over?

GRETA. I want you to let me go.

PRITCHARD. What about me?

GRETA. You have your wife and family.

PRITCHARD [*coldly*]. We will leave my wife and family out of the discussion.

GRETA. As you please; I didn't mean anything.

PRITCHARD. I can't see what the devil has come over you. There is not a wish or a whim, a comfort or luxury, that I haven't provided for.

GRETA. They have been your whims, your luxuries, not mine.

PRITCHARD. What do you want to do?

GRETA. Begin all over again, start afresh.

PRITCHARD. Earn your own living, I suppose?

GRETA. Yes.

PRITCHARD. How?

GRETA. I did it once; I can do it again.

PRITCHARD. I tell you it's impossible. You talk of beginning all over again, starting afresh. Well, you can't do it. I don't want to be brutal, but if a woman chooses as you've chosen, the thing is irrevocable.

GRETA. That isn't so. You know it isn't so. Oh, you *are* brutal!

PRITCHARD. Maybe I am, but it's because I'm telling you the truth. What chance have you got anywhere, at anything? There's nothing you can do that ten thousand other women can't do better; you've tried, you've failed. Why should you succeed any better now?

GRETA. I want another chance.

PRITCHARD. I *want* you to stay with me. I've made too many sacrifices, thrown away too much, to give you up for any such damned foolish notion.

GRETA. Can't you be big enough to see that it's the best thing for us both? We're unhappy and discontented; why go on this way?

PRITCHARD. I'd rather be unhappy and discontented with you than without you. I've got no illusions about starting over again; I've burned my bridges behind me; so have you.

GRETA. No, no — I don't believe it.

PRITCHARD. I say yes: *you* have anyhow.

GRETA. Somewhere, somehow, day by day, and if it takes years, I can build my bridges again.

PRITCHARD. You never can. Those respectable people you were talking about will never let you. They'll preach to you and tell you how sorry they are that you're not as good as they, but they'll bar you out till doomsday.

GRETA. Just as you are trying to do now.

PRITCHARD. It's the world's way, my dear. You know it as well as I.

GRETA. Can't you reach a little higher than the world's level for once? Be generous; help me!

PRITCHARD. Haven't I helped you?

GRETA. Down, not up.

PRITCHARD. Are you trying to blame me?

GRETA. There is no question of blame. The folly of one was the folly of the other. I am not trying to escape that.

PRITCHARD. So be it. Then we must both abide by our folly.

GRETA. I must at least have the chance of atoning for mine.

PRITCHARD. I'll never give you up, Greta. If you go away, I'll follow you. If you hide, I'll find you.

GRETA. You are terribly unfair — to me — to yourself, to — to others. I'm trying to do the right thing. Can't you understand that?

PRITCHARD. I don't want to understand it. I shan't give you up; that's final. [*An electric bell sounds faintly off L. They pay no heed to it.*] And if you cut and run, I'll never rest till I bring you back. You'll be glad to come too.

GRETA. Is that a challenge?

PRITCHARD. If you accept it, you'll hope that it's a promise. [*There is a tap at the door.*]

GRETA [*answering*]. Yes? Come.
[*A smart Maid appears in the doorway.*]

MAID. Mr. Brierly, ma'am.

GRETA. Show him in.

MAID. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits to L.*]

GRETA [*rising and moving to R.*]. I'll be back in a moment.

PRITCHARD [*calling after her*]. Forget this damned nonsense, and try to be yourself. [*A moment after Brierly enters from L.*] Helloa, Eric.

BRIERLY. Helloa, Jack.

PRITCHARD. Greta was expecting you to dine with us tonight.

BRIERLY. Come to offer apologies.

PRITCHARD. Backing out?

BRIERLY. I have to; I'm off tomorrow unexpectedly, as I shall be busy all evening.

PRITCHARD. Off? Where to?

BRIERLY [*laughing*]. Back to the woods.

PRITCHARD. You don't mean Minnesota?

BRIERLY. That's what I mean. I had a wire this morning saying there was trouble brewing with one of the miner's unions.

PRITCHARD. Strike buster, eh?

BRIERLY. Sort of one. I may be able to save 'em a lot of trouble if I'm on the spot.

PRITCHARD. You defeat me, Eric; I can't figure you out at that game. I suppose we'll lose you now for another two years?

BRIERLY. Can't tell. New York isn't as alluring as it used to be.

PRITCHARD. Nothing is; but I can remember when you used to set the pace for all of us.

BRIERLY. We did racket around a bit.

PRITCHARD. Do you recollect a supper you gave at Martin's to that English company that was over here from the Gaiety?

BRIERLY. Of course I do.

PRITCHARD. We followed 'em over to Baltimore afterward. There was a little blonde — or was she a brunette?

BRIERLY [*laughing*]. 'Pon my soul, I've forgotten.

PRITCHARD. You rode in the Steeplechase down there.

BRIERLY. Yes, and got very tight at the Club the night before the race.

PRITCHARD. I remember you bet Bill Ayer ten thousand to one you'd win; and did win too.

BRIERLY. I had to.

PRITCHARD. You put us all over the jumps in those days.

BRIERLY. Well, I'm travelling on the flat now; it's safer. [*Greta re-enters from R. Brierly goes to meet her, shaking hands.*]

PRITCHARD. Brierly is backing out of his dinner tonight, Greta.

GRETA. No! — are you?

BRIERLY. I'm terribly sorry, but I'm packing up tonight for an early start in the morning.

GRETA [*controlling herself well*]. You are going away?

PRITCHARD. Tired of New York after two months. What do you think of him?

BRIERLY. I have really got to go, and a little sooner than I expected.

PRITCHARD. How about that theatre tonight, Greta?

GRETA. Just as you wish.

PRITCHARD. I'll run around to the club and get the tickets.

GRETA. Very well.

PRITCHARD. Wait until I come back, Eric.

BRIERLY. If you're not too long.
[*Pritchard exits at L.*]

GRETA. Isn't this rather unexpected — your going?

BRIERLY. Very. I had a telegram this morning, and it is most important for me to get West.

GRETA. I hope that doesn't mean there is something wrong?

BRIERLY. Oh, the annual flare-up between the men and the Company. A little sympathetic common-sense will straighten it out, I think.

GRETA. Are you to supply that?

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. I am supposed to. Capital and labor have left that out of their reckoning, and that's just where their system weakens and falls down.

GRETA. How do you mean?

BRIERLY. I mean that the leaders of both organizations look upon them as machines, not realizing that men and women the world over have got to be approached, led, persuaded from the human standpoint.

GRETA. I think I understand.

BRIERLY. That is the one hopeful thing to me about all this ferment that is going on around us.

GRETA. What?

BRIERLY. It comes from a new sense of a large and generous humanity.

GRETA. Is there such a thing as a generous humanity?

BRIERLY. It's something worth striving for.

GRETA. Meanwhile it crushes one.

BRIERLY. It may crush a few of us — many of us. But there never was an ideal transformed into a reality that didn't mean suffering, sacrifice —

GRETA. I can hardly realize that you are going away . . . that I shan't see you again. You have taught — showed me a great many things during the last two months. I am afraid I shall miss you dreadfully.

BRIERLY [*lightly*]. You have been so eager to know things, so sympathetic to all my theories, that I am afraid there would be little more for me to tell you, if I should stay longer.

GRETA. You have helped me to see things — to feel things — that I never knew existed. I am almost afraid to be left alone with all the new ideas you have put into my head.

BRIERLY. Afraid? Why?

GRETA. I know I shall never have the courage, alone, to apply them — to live up to them.

BRIERLY. Have you thought over what we talked about the other day?

GRETA. Every moment since.

BRIERLY. That is the important starting point, you know.

GRETA. I know, I know, but I'm not strong enough.

BRIERLY. Have you tried?

GRETA. I spoke to him today: we were talking about it just before you came. He will consent to nothing.

BRIERLY. It's not a question of his consent, but of your determination. I don't mean that it is simple or easy, but you've got to take your own line, without any hope of assistance from him. What did he say?

GRETA. Ridiculed everything I proposed and refused to consider it.

BRIERLY. I supposed he would. He could hardly be guilty of that sort of inconsistency. Self-indulgence is not easily persuaded to an opposite point of view.

GRETA. He will make it impossible for me.

BRIERLY. He may make it harder; he can't make it impossible. Remember, we are the captains of our souls; we must lead them or let them be led captive.

GRETA. I know what you mean, and I believe what you've told me. You are the only one who has ever opened my eyes to very real things. You have made me want to do what is right and yet whichever way I turn, there seems something to block the way, throw me back.

BRIERLY. That's the desperate, heart-breaking thing. The right way seems always such a devilish rough way.

GRETA. What am I to do? It is not as if I had friends, opportunities, capacities. I have none. Untrained — unfit, with no connections of any sort, no one to fall back upon. No wonder he laughs when I talk of starting all over again.

BRIERLY [*angrily*]. He laughed at you?

GRETA. Yes.

BRIERLY [*after a moment*]. There *are* opportunities, occupations, numberless chances.

GRETA. Not for me in New York.

BRIERLY. Why not?

GRETA. He would never leave me alone. He said so.

BRIERLY. But somewhere away?

GRETA. He swears he will follow me. And if I did escape him — here, there, anywhere — what then? A cloak model, perhaps, or a manicure.

BRIERLY. Life has something else for you than that; I know it.

GRETA [*bitterly*]. Not without references.

BRIERLY. Don't talk like that. It isn't yourself.

GRETA. But I mean it. Just suppose that I leave all this tomorrow; drop Jack Pritchard out of my life and start in to make my own way. Where would I begin? It is all very well for me to come to a realization that I've committed a folly, gone the wrong road — and I do realize that, you've shown me — but which way am I to turn?

BRIERLY. You haven't thought that I expected you to fight this out by yourself?

GRETA. I've got to fight it out by myself, if at all, and I don't think I've got the strength — the moral strength to do it. You have filled me with the beauty of an idea; but how long, I ask myself, before the beauty of it will fade under the drive and monotony of necessity? Would I not find myself after not many months ready to compromise — willing to do what he said I'd do?

BRIERLY. What?

GRETA. Come back to him. You see I don't trust myself. I'm weak — weak, oh, so weak.

BRIERLY. It takes courage to admit that.

GRETA. He said I had burned my bridges, and I told him that I would build them again.

BRIERLY. And so you shall.

GRETA. I'm not so sure that it is as possible as I pretended it would be. Repairing of bridges is a hard task for women — even good women — and as for me — [*She breaks off with a little despairing gesture.*] But what's the difference? My bridges came from nowhere; rebuilt, they would lead to nowhere.

BRIERLY. What do you mean by nowhere?

GRETA. I have neither friends, relations nor position; I am alone.

BRIERLY. But hasn't every one of us, somewhere within ourselves, little islands of pride, honour, courage, to

say nothing of the big mainland of self-respect, from which we often find ourselves detached, adrift? Isn't it worth while to connect ourselves once more with them — mend our bridges if they're broken, rebuild them span by span, if they're gone?

GRETA. Yes, if you can, but deep in me I feel that I can't, that it's hopeless.

BRIERLY. Nothing is hopeless for the human spirit, that sees and feels.

GRETA. But I can't see and I'm numb. There is nothing outside these four walls for me but a blank.

BRIERLY. First we must get outside these four walls.

GRETA. How?

BRIERLY. Let me show you the way.

GRETA. But you are going — tomorrow.

BRIERLY. Come with me.

GRETA. With you?

BRIERLY. Yes. Would that be venturing too much?

GRETA. You mean what you say?

BRIERLY. Absolutely.

GRETA. You ask me to leave Jack Pritchard? — to — to go away with you?

BRIERLY. When I asked you to go with me, I meant as my wife.

GRETA [*looking at him wide-eyed, with twitching mouth, as she repeats mechanically*]. As your wife! [*Then she*

realizes the depth of her misunderstanding and bursts into a paroxysm of tears.]

BRIERLY. We could be married tonight, or early tomorrow morning; then start West.

GRETA [*not looking at him, her face buried in her arms on the table*]. I couldn't let you sacrifice yourself that way.

BRIERLY. There's no question of sacrifice; not the least little bit. I have destroyed something to which rightly or wrongly you were clinging.

GRETA. I've hated it for months and months.

BRIERLY. But you never thought of escape?

GRETA. Not until you came.

BRIERLY. It's easy enough to destroy, pull down; anyone can do it, but he's a fool who does it without something better to put in its place. Now to my mind your life with Pritchard hasn't been life on the best of terms — but it's better than life on no terms at all, which is what the world offers to friendless, dependent women. So take a chance — a big one, I grant you — and come with me.

GRETA. I can't see you do this out of generosity — pity.

BRIERLY. It is neither pity nor generosity. I'll be perfectly frank — it's because I admire your courage and honesty, and because I want to pay my share of an obligation which is partly mine. My name will be a protection to you while you are finding yourself, getting your feet on the ground. Out there in

Minnesota, with me, you will see men and women, unhappier than you: that will be the surest tonic in the world. And perhaps their lives, and my work with them may come to interest you. Who knows? Anyway, you and I will be comrades and friends, and after we get all those new bridges built —

GRETA [*wonderingly*]. Bridges?

BRIERLY. You haven't forgotten them?

GRETA [*with a faintest smile*]. Oh — no!

BRIERLY. If at any time you want to recross — go back — go anywhere there will be nothing to hinder. What do you say? Will you come?

GRETA [*looking him full in the face, with an indefinite look of new hope, and adoring admiration*]. Yes, I will. [*He puts out his hand and they clasp hands.*]

BRIERLY. You can trust me.

GRETA. I know. When shall we go?

BRIERLY. Now. As soon as you are ready.

GRETA. I'll hurry, so that we can get away before — [*Hesitates.*]

BRIERLY [*quickly, guessing what she means*]. Oh, no, that wouldn't do! He must know from us.

GRETA. He will be furious. I — I think I shall be afraid of him.

BRIERLY. The memory of a little fury will be better than the thought that we didn't start straight.

GRETA. He may be late.

BRIERLY. I'll call up the club and see if he is there. [*He moves toward the telephone on the table.*]

GRETA [*moving to door at R.*]. I will get my things.

BRIERLY [*taking the receiver of the telephone off*]. Take just as little as possible. We shall be in Chicago for a week, the day after tomorrow. You can get everything there.

GRETA. Very well. [*She exits, leaving the door open.*]

BRIERLY [*at the telephone*]. Give me 4437 Bryant. [*After a moment.*] Yes, please. [*After a few moments.*] Is this Bryant 4437? Will you see if Mr. John Pritchard is at the club? This is Mr. Eric Brierly speaking.

GRETA [*from off*]. Is he there? —

BRIERLY [*keeps the receiver at his ear*]. They are seeing. You can go to a hotel tonight.

GRETA. Yes.

BRIERLY. There is a very quiet decent one over on Forty-fifth Street. I forget the name.

GRETA. I know.

BRIERLY [*turning to the mouth-piece of the telephone*]. Yes, this is Mr. Brierly. He's not in? Was in, but went right out? Thank you — thank you very much. [*Hangs up the receiver and speaks toward the open door.*] He has left.

GRETA [*off*]. He should be here then in a few minutes.

BRIERLY. Yes. I'll meet you the first thing in the morning, early; and after breakfast we'll go to Jersey City — hunt up a parson to marry us and then catch the first train for Chicago on the Pennsylvania.

GRETA [*off*]. Yes.

BRIERLY. Will you mind spending the evening alone? I have a dozen things to attend to, and a good deal of packing.

GRETA [*off*]. No, not at all.

BRIERLY. I'll send my man around about nine to see if there is anything you want.

GRETA [*off*]. I shan't want anything.

BRIERLY. I will give you my telephone number anyhow.

GRETA [*off*]. Yes, I should like that. [*She comes to the open door. She has changed her evening gown for a street dress.*] Tell me — [*She hesitates a moment.*]

BRIERLY. Yes?

GRETA. When did you think of — of our going — being married?

BRIERLY. While we've been talking here.

GRETA. Not before?

BRIERLY. No. Why?

GRETA. It's not too late — to — to change your mind, you know.

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. Yes, it's too late for that: I don't know how.

GRETA. It will be a blow to your friends.

BRIERLY. My friends have become accustomed to the unexpected.

GRETA. Very well. [*She turns back into the room off.*] [*Brierly turns the pages of a book on the table aimlessly for a moment. The door behind him at L. opens and Pritchard enters. Brierly turns quietly on hearing him.*]

PRITCHARD. I was afraid I'd miss you. Carton insisted on my having a cocktail, and a couple of other fellows joined us and I had a hard time getting away.

BRIERLY. I waited for you.

PRITCHARD. Good! Where's Greta?

BRIERLY. She went out just a moment ago.

PRITCHARD [*quickly*]. Out?

BRIERLY [*nodding toward R.*]. I mean in the other room.

PRITCHARD. Oh! And you are really going tomorrow, eh?

BRIERLY. Yes. First thing in the morning.

PRITCHARD [*lowering his voice*]. Have you seen Fanny?

BRIERLY. I stopped in just before I came here, but she wasn't home.

PRITCHARD. You can drop in tonight. I don't think she's going anywhere.

BRIERLY. Sorry, but I can't. You must take her my good-byes. I've got the devil of a lot to do tonight.

PRITCHARD. She'll never forgive you.

BRIERLY. Have you ever tested Fanny's powers of forgiveness?

PRITCHARD. I can't say that I have; I am afraid the strain would be too great.

BRIERLY. Why don't you?

PRITCHARD. What are you talking about?

BRIERLY. Jack, I am going to claim special privilege tonight: the privilege of a little plain speaking.

PRITCHARD. Plainer than usual?

BRIERLY. Yes, I think my old friendship for you and Fanny warrants it.

PRITCHARD. Go ahead.

BRIERLY. You know it's possible that I may never see either of you again.

PRITCHARD. Ridiculous!

BRIERLY. I'm queer, Jack; I have premonitions. But that has nothing to do with what I want to say. Why can't you and Fanny come together again?

PRITCHARD. Because it's impossible.

BRIERLY. Don't say impossible. I know reconciliation is a damned hard, bitter thing; I know it calls for all sorts of compromises that are detestable to our pride and vanity.

PRITCHARD [*with a little laugh*]. Incurably the parson, Eric.

BRIERLY. Perhaps; but also incurably your friend and Fanny's.

PRITCHARD. My dear Eric, it is useless to talk about it any further. Whatever you think, whatever any one thinks, makes not the slightest difference. I am committed to Greta and she to me. That is final. [*Greta appears in the doorway at R. She has on her coat and hat and gloves, and carries a neat hand-bag. A black veil is pushed up so that her face shows. She stands unobserved for a moment, and then Pritchard, turning, sees her.*]

PRITCHARD [*facing about with a queer look on his face*]. Helloa! Where are you going?

GRETA [*in a low voice*]. Out.

PRITCHARD [*peremptorily*]. Where?
[*Greta gives a quick, almost supplicating glance toward Brierly.*]

BRIERLY. Jack, we're going away together.

PRITCHARD [*looking from one to the other*]. You are going — together! The hell you are!

BRIERLY. We were waiting to tell you.

PRITCHARD. See here, Eric, do you think you can get away with this? Do you think I will stand for it? [*To Greta.*] Or you? Take off your things; you don't move a step.

BRIERLY [*quietly, controlling himself*]. This whole thing is very painful and bitter for all three of us, but it's got to be gone through. Don't make it any harder, Jack, than it really is.

PRITCHARD. So this is the point of all your solicitude, all your high moral talk! Well, this proceeding shews the worth of it. She stays here, and with me.

BRIERLY. By what right?

PRITCHARD. Because she's mine.

BRIERLY [*hard, determined*]. No, she is not yours; she is to become my wife!

PRITCHARD [*dropping back a little, staring blankly*]. Your wife! [*Then in a frenzy of anger.*] You lie! You lie! I say — you're not the damned fool you pretend to be!

BRIERLY [*hardly able to keep himself in; to Greta*]. Come, there's been enough of this. [*She shrinks to his side.*]

PRITCHARD. No, I say!

BRIERLY [*full of dominant*]. I say *yes!*

PRITCHARD [*moving quickly to door at L. to bar the way. He is in a paroxysm of rage and distress*]. Do you know why he's doing this thing, Greta; do you know?

BRIERLY [*sternly*]. Let us by!

PRITCHARD [*paying no heed, but addressing himself wildly to Greta, who clings to Brierly's left arm*]. Do you

know, I say, why he's doing this? It's because he loves my wife! Yes, my wife, you understand!

BRIERLY [*sweeping him powerfully aside, in a burst of furious anger*]. Out of the way, you swine!

[*He flings open the door and he and Greta exit. Pritchard stands with a dazed, vacant look on his face, leaning heavily against a small table where Brierly has flung him. The outer door slams.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE. *A large living room in Eric Brierly's house, out in the Mesaba Mountains, Minnesota. Quietly furnished with solid, substantial, good looking furniture. Doors at upper R. and L., and at lower R. and L. A fireplace between the doors at R. Facing it a long low settee. At Back two windows with chintz curtains, a table between, on which is a telephone. Between the doors at L. a plain desk with writing materials. There are heads of game on the walls. A gun rack with rifles and shot guns fills one of the spaces. There are books and papers about. It is early afternoon in February, one year after the preceding act.*

AT RISE. *Brierly and Doctor Graham are discovered. Graham is a gruff, weather-beaten, wise old country doctor.*

DOCTOR. Do you know, Eric, before you came out here, I was convinced that there wasn't another damned fool like me in the world.

ERIC [*smiling*]. You are unique, Doc, but not in respect to your damn foolishness.

DOCTOR. You admit there's a pair of us.

ERIC. There's always a pair, sometimes even triplets. They may never come across one another, but one can always be sure that somewhere there is an idiot identical with oneself.

DOCTOR. Your theory is consoling if not convincing.

ERIC. But you and I drag the idea out of the realm of theory, on to the hard ground of fact.

DOCTOR. I am not so sure of that.

ERIC. Why?

DOCTOR. I think perhaps you're a bigger ass than I am.

ERIC [*laughing*]. Really! And how do I get that way?

DOCTOR. Through sheer perversity. You live out in this God-forsaken place because you want to; I am doctoring here because I have to.

ERIC. You're doctoring here because the men would strike if you quit; so would I.

DOCTOR. I insist that there's a difference in our asininity; you *could* escape.

ERIC. Escape to where? And what for? There isn't a nook or cranny of the world today that isn't under the black paw of so-called civilization. There is no escape.

DOCTOR. Well, there are less dreary aspects of civilization than are to be found in Mesaba.

ERIC. I prefer to see it stripped to the buff as it is here; that at least keeps one from fooling oneself.

DOCTOR. My dear Eric, nothing ever keeps one from doing that. Damn foolishness is the protective illusion that nature supplies to intelligent human beings like you and me; otherwise we'd be screaming with fear, or shrieking with laughter.

ERIC. We'd be making ridiculous noises of some sort or other, no doubt.

DOCTOR. I'm not so sure but what that is the kind we are making.

ERIC. Nonsense!

DOCTOR. Oh, hell, what's it all amount to?

ERIC. Not getting discouraged?

DOCTOR. I have never been discouraged in my life for more than two or three minutes at a time; that isn't what I mean.

ERIC. What do you mean?

DOCTOR. Oh, sometimes the futility of the whole blooming thing appalls me.

ERIC. The futility of what?

DOCTOR. Of our little game out here: trying to set the globe spinning in the opposite direction. For three years we've been tussling with the four to six thousand men who mine this district, and what's the sum total?

ERIC. We've got them pretty well in hand, haven't we?

DOCTOR. Oh, we have been able to humanize them a little.

ERIC. That's something, isn't it?

DOCTOR. It's like giving sugar-coated pills for a chronic disease. What do you think would happen if we threw up the job tomorrow?

ERIC. But we're not going to throw up the job tomorrow — or next day either.

DOCTOR. I know we're not. That's our particular form of insanity; and that's what I'm coming to.

ERIC. I thought you had something on your chest.

DOCTOR. May I get rid of it?

ERIC. Go to it.

DOCTOR. Well, I've been thinking a good deal lately about your wife, Eric.

ERIC. About Greta? What is it?

DOCTOR. You don't mind my talking freely?

ERIC. I'll mind if you don't. Go ahead.

DOCTOR. I don't think Mesaba is the place for her.

ERIC. It doesn't agree with her? She isn't well, you mean?

DOCTOR. It isn't a matter of health — it's — [*Hesitating.*]

ERIC. What?

DOCTOR. Well, it's more a matter of happiness.

ERIC. Happiness?

DOCTOR. I just think she's been here long enough.

ERIC [*cautiously*]. You think she's unhappy?

DOCTOR. My dear Eric, if I thought so, I wouldn't venture the impertinence of saying it. No, it isn't that.

ERIC. What then?

DOCTOR. It goes back to what we were maundering about: our being a couple of lunatics at large. Tilting at wind-mills is all very well for us — for me in particular — but I'm hanged if I think it is good enough for Mrs. Brierly.

BRIERLY [*as if to himself*]. You're right: it isn't good enough — for any woman.

DOCTOR. Not the kind of wind-mills we're talking of; they are a man's job.

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. I didn't know there was a man's job left in the world.

DOCTOR. That's just one of the little jokes that industry, the modern ogre, is trying to play on old Dame Nature.

BRIERLY. My God, how I hate industry!

DOCTOR. So does old Dame Nature. She loves hard work, but she hates this modern machine-made thing that tears the vitals out of men, women, and children, merely for the sake of making something to sell.

BRIERLY. And you advise me to chuck it all?

DOCTOR. Chuck it all, and go back to your own people before it's too late.

BRIERLY. Too late?

DOCTOR. Before you've lost the desire to go, before you've forgotten that somewhere in the world there are people who know the joy of life.

BRIERLY. I've long since lost the desire to play with the people who know the joy of life; lost it, because most of them have forgotten how to share it. No, Doc, if I ever pull up stakes it will be to go a little further into the wilderness.

DOCTOR. And how about her?

BRIERLY. We are all fools errant. Where folly leaves off and wisdom begins, one must decide for oneself.

DOCTOR. All of which is definite and conclusive. [*They drink. Greta enters from down L. She goes up to the Doctor and Brierly.*]

GRETA. Oh, Doctor, I didn't know you were here.

DOCTOR [*cordially, taking her hand*]. How are you? Eric and I have been gossiping here by the fire for the last half hour.

GRETA. Eric, Tom Molloy and a man named Cassidy are here to see you; I showed them into your office.

BRIERLY. Are they there now?

GRETA. Yes.

BRIERLY. I'll see them — [*Moves toward door at lower L.*]

DOCTOR. Is that Cassidy of the United Miners?

BRIERLY. Yes; he is here for the meeting of the men tonight. I heard he was coming up from Duluth. I shan't be long.

DOCTOR. Don't hurry for me; I must be off.

BRIERLY. Nonsense! Keep him, Greta.

GRETA. I'll try.

DOCTOR. Don't let those fellows put anything over on you.

BRIERLY. I defy anyone to try it after that prescription of yours. [*Exits at lower L.*]

DOCTOR. What's up?

GRETA. Trying to get us to join the Miners' Union.

DOCTOR [*testily*]. So that we can help them strike in the Spring, I suppose.

GRETA. That's what Eric thinks.

DOCTOR. Well, I hope we'll keep out.

GRETA. I know Eric is opposed to it.

DOCTOR. How about Molloy?

GRETA. I'm not sure. Have you seen his wife today?

DOCTOR. I was there this morning; she's coming along finely; ought to be about now in no time.

GRETA. I am going down to see her about four o'clock.

DOCTOR. I am glad you are; she needs just a little encouragement. Let me tell you, you have done more for her than all my medicine.

GRETA. I don't believe that, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Fishing for compliments, eh?

GRETA. I love them.

DOCTOR. Well, I'm a poor hand at it, but I do want to say this — something I've been wanting to tell you for a long time, that I think it was Providence that sent you out here to raise us all out of our misery.

GRETA [*shaking her head*]. No, no, doctor; you and Eric have done it all.

DOCTOR. Why, it wasn't till you came that we really got hold of these people.

GRETA. They idolized you both before they ever set eyes on me.

DOCTOR. We couldn't nurse the women and look after the babies.

GRETA. Perhaps I have helped with them.

DOCTOR. I know, better than anyone, how much.

GRETA. I've tried hard, I really have.

DOCTOR. And accomplished much.

GRETA. Poor little creatures with their helpless, inadequate mothers! It's the children that cry out to me.

DOCTOR. If we starve, overwork, and neglect them, Nature's reckoning against us will be a terrible one. Why, before Eric came out here I've seen lads of ten working twelve hours a day hard labour; men and

women drained to the last drop, housed in kennels, and flung on the scrap heap when they dropped in the harness.

GRETA. I know; Eric has told me.

DOCTOR. And this is only one of thousands of hives dedicated to the great god industry.

GRETA. What a puzzle — what a horrible puzzle the whole thing is!

DOCTOR. What?

GRETA. Why, the comfort and happiness of so few rests on the misery of so many, many others.

DOCTOR [*rising to go*]. Well, that's a puzzle that you and I will have to postpone solving.

GRETA. Don't go.

DOCTOR. Dear Mrs. Brierly, do you think I want to? I'd like to sit here and grumble and philosophize the rest of the afternoon.

GRETA. Soon again, then.

DOCTOR. You may depend on that. [*They exit at upper L. The door at lower L. opens and Cassidy, Molloy and Brierly enter. Cassidy is a man of coarse type, the successful leader of the Miners' Union; Molloy is a working man of the more intelligent class, a local leader and friend of Brierly's. They have their coats and carry fur caps in their hands.*]

CASSIDY. Well, you'll come down to Molloy's tonight and talk it over with the others?

BRIERLY. Yes, I'll come; but I tell you frankly, Cassidy, there's no chance of my changing my mind.

CASSIDY [*with an unpleasant laugh*]. Yours is not the only mind that's working on this proposition.

BRIERLY. You're quite right, and I'm only speaking for myself. I've told both you and Molloy in there . . . [*pointing to room they have just quitted*] . . . that we are not ready yet, in my opinion, to join the Miners' Union.

CASSIDY [*with the air of one who sees the opportunity of reopening an argument that has been closed*]. Don't you believe in the Union?

BRIERLY. I believe in the Union, and I think Molloy will agree with me that the Mesaba Iron and Coal Company has the best organized one in the country today.

MOLLOY. I'm sure of it.

CASSIDY. That's all very well, but what good does that do us? You're strong, we're weak; we need you.

BRIERLY. You've got some seventy odd thousand men in your organization; we have five. And our five thousand men have bigger wages, shorter hours, and turn out more work per man than any other group of miners in the world.

CASSIDY. I don't care how much work they do, as long as the wages and hours are right.

BRIERLY. Well, on that basis, you and your Union won't get very far. There are two sides to the labour question, you know.

CASSIDY. I know you think so.

BRIERLY. How do you mean?

CASSIDY. I suppose you have no objections to my telling the other fellows when we meet tonight the amount of stock you hold in the Mesaba Coal and Iron Company.

BRIERLY. No, I haven't; and it's a pretty good investment.

CASSIDY [*sneeringly*]. I guess it is — for you.

BRIERLY. Pretty good for our Union too; for the last three years eighty per cent of my income from that stock has been invested in property that now belongs to our men outright; a training school, a co-operative store, a lecture hall. Am I right, Molloy?

MOLLOY. You are, sir.

BRIERLY. And if we are to go into these details at tonight's meeting, I suppose you'll not mind my telling of the five thousand dollars you got from the Buffalo Ore Company for calling off the strike at their furnace last autumn?

CASSIDY [*angrily*]. That's a lie!

BRIERLY [*looking him in the eye*]. No, it isn't. You are just forgetting a little.

CASSIDY [*with bluster*]. Now I tell you. . . .

BRIERLY [*interrupting, firmly, with a look in his eye that stops Cassidy open-mouthed*]. You've been doing a lot of telling this afternoon, Cassidy. Just let me

tell you something. You are not on to your job. Molloy and I collected three times what you did from our company for stopping a strike here six months ago, and we built a babies' hospital with it. That may seem foolish beside the automobile you ride around Cleveland in, but it's more the sort of thing we need here.

CASSIDY. I'll put a crimp in you tonight, Brierly.

BRIERLY. All right, go as far as you like. It's all up to the men.

MOLLOY [*making a move toward door at lower L.*]. Come on, Tom. What's the use of talking that way?

BRIERLY [*moving to table at L.*]. Just a moment, Molloy, till I give you the schedule.
[*Greta enters at upper L., smiles a greeting to Cassidy, and moves toward Molloy.*]

GRETA [*to Molloy*]. I'm going around to see your wife this afternoon. The doctor tells me she is so much better.

MOLLOY. She is doing finely now — thanks to you and him.

GRETA. The doctor says he'll have her about now in no time.

CASSIDY [*to Brierly*]. Well, we will see you later.

BRIERLY. Yes.

CASSIDY. So long. [*He exits at upper L.*]

MOLLOY. Good afternoon, Mrs. Brierly.

GRETA. Good afternoon.

BRIERLY. Good-bye, Molloy. See you later. [*Molloy exits at upper L.*]

GRETA. I think I should be afraid of your friend, "Mr. Cassidy."

BRIERLY [*with a little laugh*]. He is rather a rough-neck, isn't he? But I would rather fight with one of them than with one of your subtle rascals.

GRETA. Is it a fight, then?

BRIERLY. It looks like it. They have had greedy eyes on us for the past two years. Our organization and the condition of our men are just the levers that Cassidy could use to very good advantage — for himself.

GRETA. Can he influence them?

BRIERLY. A little, not much. We have another meeting tonight. I would have let him down easy, but he needed a licking, and I'm going to give it to him.

GRETA [*with concern, looking at him*]. You don't mean . . ?

BRIERLY [*amused by her feeling, laughing out*]. Oh, I am speaking quite figuratively. It wouldn't be fair to lay hands on him.

GRETA [*after a moment*]. Do you think we — I could send Mrs. Molloy off for a little trip? She has some relations in Buffalo, and she does need a change.

BRIERLY. Yes, of course. I'll send Molloy along.

GRETA. You don't know what that will mean for them. I'll tell her when I go in this afternoon.

BRIERLY. Do you ever think of yourself, Greta?

GRETA. Constantly. Why?

BRIERLY. Because, speaking of a change and little trips, I've been thinking that you really ought to go away.

GRETA [*looking at him quickly, almost fearfully*]. I?

BRIERLY. You've been working without let-up for a year, and I know you need a rest.

GRETA. I'm not in the least tired.

BRIERLY. You won't realize that until you get off somewhere; then you will find that you are — more so than you think.

GRETA. *Where* shall I go?

BRIERLY. Anywhere you want. I tell you what I'll do I will put money to your credit at the bank; whatever you need — whatever you want.

GRETA [*involuntarily, in a low voice*]. Eric!

BRIERLY. And you can go where you will, do what you wish. We can find some companionable young woman to go along and you can just take your time and wander. I know it would do you a world of good.

GRETA. Where shall I go?

BRIERLY. Anywhere you want: North, East, South, or West, or abroad. We will plan something interesting.

GRETA [*working her hands nervously together. Almost inaudibly*]. But Eric, I don't want to go away.

BRIERLY [*gently, coaxingly*]. Oh, yes, you do! It's the very thing you need, and I have been more than thoughtless not to have proposed it before.

GRETA [*looking away from him*]. Do you want me to go?

BRIERLY [*with no realization of how he is hurting her*]. Of course I want you to go. This is no place for you to be tied to permanently.

GRETA. *You* are.

BRIERLY. What?

GRETA. Tied here.

BRIERLY [*with a smile*]. That's very different. I've got my idea — and a man of forty-five with an idea is fixed for life. It's meat and drink — and everything else to him.

GRETA. Can't I share it?

BRIERLY. What — my idea? [*She nods her head.*] Why, you have, and helped wonderfully; but it's time you were getting out in the world to see people and things. [*Very gently.*] You haven't had a fair chance, yet, my child. Life has more to show you than the grinding misery of these mines; you can only understand the real significance of that after you've had a glimpse of the beauty and splendor that thrives on it.

GRETA. I'm afraid of the splendor and beauty of life. They mean nothing to me but selfishness, greed, unhappiness.

BRIERLY. Ah, they mean much more than that; all sorts of things more than selfishness and unhappiness.

GRETA. But I don't want to go away from here, Eric, believe me I don't. The only taste of real happiness that has ever come to me I've had here. I should be wretched, utterly, hopelessly wretched anywhere else.

BRIERLY. You are timid, and I don't wonder, but there is nothing to fear. All you need is a little confidence. Travel and being on your own will bring it, and if you really get mixed up, I shall be ready always, you know. You mustn't think, Greta, that I'm trying to shift any responsibility. I only want to do the best for you, have you do the best thing for yourself.

GRETA. I understand, Eric. I understand perfectly. I know you think it is what I want — what I need — but it isn't. Don't send me away. I couldn't stand it. Honestly — it would kill me, Eric! If you knew, if I could only tell, what the past year has been to me, you would understand. My old vicious, bitter self is dead, dead absolutely, and in its place is something stronger, better. It has grown with your help, by the example it has had from your kindliness, your generosity, your courage — not only to these poor creatures about us to whom you have brought new hope, but to me who, not long ago, was just as wretched, just as heart-sore as they. Can't you see what it would mean for me to have to go? Don't make me, don't, please don't.

BRIERLY [*deeply touched*]. Why, Greta!

GRETA. If I'm in the way here, if it bothers you to see me about so much, let me take a little house near by — or far away if you'd rather, just so I can see you once in a while, talk to you, perhaps help you a little. That's all I ask — that's all.

BRIERLY. You are not in the way, Greta, and you've never bothered me. Have I been so dull as to make you think that? You have worked so unselfishly, so constantly and with such sympathy that your being here has meant more to me than I can tell you. But I wouldn't for the world have you fettered by any sense, even the slightest — of an obligation to stay.

GRETA. I feel no obligation — in the way you mean.

BRIERLY. I want you to feel absolutely free.

GRETA. I never could feel that away from — [*she hesitates for the shade of a moment*] from here.

BRIERLY. What do you mean?

GRETA. You will let me stay?

BRIERLY. It's for you to do as you wish. But will you promise me one thing?

GRETA. Anything. What is it?

BRIERLY. There is nothing very desperate about it; I only want you to promise to come to me frankly, if at any time you have the slightest change of mind and do wish to go.

GRETA. I promise.

BRIERLY [*breaking off*]. I will not be home tonight. The meeting of the men will probably hold late, and I want to be at number six early in the morning, so I'll go home with Grierson.

GRETA. I am going out myself a little later. Shall I see you before you go?

BRIERLY. Oh, yes. [*He exits at lower R. Greta turns and stands with one foot resting on the fireplace fender, gazing into the fire. A few moments later Ellen, a maid, enters at upper L.*]

ELLEN. A gentleman to see Mr. Brierly.

GRETA [*turning slightly toward her*]. Show him in, Ellen, and I will tell Mr. Brierly.

ELLEN. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits at upper L.*]

[*A moment after Stannard enters at lower L. He wears a heavily fur-lined coat, "arctic" rubbers, and carries a cap and fur gloves in his hand. Greta turns on hearing him enter.*]

STANNARD [*not recognizing her*]. I came to see Mr. Brierly.

GRETA [*who for an instant has not known him; goes to him quickly*]. Why, Jim Stannard! Don't you know me?

STANNARD [*in surprise*]. Greta Ellis!

GRETA. No — Greta Brierly.

STANNARD. What?

GRETA. Mrs. Brierly.

STANNARD [*in wonderment*]. Mrs. Brierly — you mean? —

GRETA. You didn't know?

STANNARD. How should I? Brierly is not very communicative —

GRETA [*hesitating, Pritchard flashing across her mind*]. No, but —

STANNARD [*seeing the thought in her face*]. No, he never spoke of it — to me at least. He's dead, you know.

GRETA. Dead? Jack Pritchard dead?

STANNARD. Yes, three months ago. He died very suddenly; pneumonia.

GRETA [*in a low voice*]. I — I hadn't heard. Did Eric know?

STANNARD. Not from me.

GRETA. Does Eric expect you — here?

STANNARD. I wrote him some weeks ago that I should be out. I am one of the officers of the company, you know.

GRETA. Yes, I remember. Do take off your coat. I'll call Eric. [*Stannard takes off his coat and Greta moves to door at lower R. and taps.*] Eric.

BRIERLY [*after a moment, off*]. Yes.

GRETA. Mr. Stannard is here.

BRIERLY [*off*]. Who?

GRETA. Mr. Stannard.

BRIERLY. Oh, is he? I shall be out in a moment. [*Greta rejoins Stannard, who stands near the fire.*]

GRETA [*with a smile*]. I am afraid I didn't say how do you do, or how glad I was to see you.

STANNARD [*astonishment still in his voice, look and manner*]. I can hardly believe my eyes yet. I've wondered and puzzled so much about you.

GRETA. There is not a morning that I wake that I don't wonder and puzzle about myself.

STANNARD. Ah, you must remember I told you he was wonderful.

GRETA. Yes, but not how wonderful. You never could have guessed.

STANNARD. No doubt he has converted you to his whole social propaganda.

GRETA. Not only converted; he has made me over. Whatever I am — and God knows I'm different — he has made me.

STANNARD. You know how very glad I am for you.

GRETA. Yes, I know. You were the only one who understood.

STANNARD. How did it happen?

GRETA. In the same way that it has happened to all the strays he has befriended.

STANNARD. Oh, more than that!

GRETA. Perhaps — [*After a moment.*] Tell me, does she know?

STANNARD. She?

GRETA. Mrs. — [*She hesitates.*]

STANNARD [*guesses whom she means*]. I — I think not.

GRETA. You know he loved her.

STANNARD [*wonderingly*]. Did he tell you?

GRETA. No — *he* didn't tell me, but — *I know.* That is the chief reason.

STANNARD. Reason for what?

GRETA. For my being here.

STANNARD. I don't understand you.

GRETA. Can you conceive of her being wretchedly unhappy?

STANNARD. Yes — I know she was.

GRETA. I was the cause of it.

STANNARD. Only indirectly; unhappiness usually stretches back to all sorts of obscure sources.

GRETA. But I was the obvious one.

STANNARD. Perhaps.

GRETA. I know it. That is why he brought me away. [*As he makes a deprecating gesture.*] Oh, don't think for an instant that he made pretence of anything else. He lifted me from the mire, brought me to solid ground, and has shown me what life is really worth.

STANNARD [*with a smile*]. That's a secret for the few.

GRETA. For all who care to pay the price.

STANNARD [*whimsically*]. Which is?

GRETA. Self-sacrifice.

STANNARD. The price is too high for this old world of ours.

GRETA. That's what makes it precious. [*Brierly enters from lower R.*]

BRIERLY [*going to him*]. Helloa, Jim, did you think I was never coming?

STANNARD [*as they shake hands*]. How are you, Eric?

BRIERLY. When did you get here?

STANNARD. Late last night; came up from Duluth.

BRIERLY. Why didn't you come here?

STANNARD [*evasively*]. Oh, there were several of us, and we went to the hotel.

BRIERLY. But you must come here.

GRETA. Of course you must.

STANNARD. Sure you've got room?

BRIERLY. What a question!

GRETA. I must leave you now. I have errands in town. Shall I telephone to the hotel to have your luggage sent up?

STANNARD. Oh, no, thanks; I'll attend to that.

GRETA. I'll see you when I get back. [*She exits at upper R.*]

BRIERLY. Well, my dear Jim; I am delighted to see you.

STANNARD. You mysterious old hermit thrush, are you ever delighted to see anybody?

BRIERLY [*laughing*]. Full of business, I suppose?

STANNARD. Yes, but there's plenty of time for that. What have you been up to?

BRIERLY [*smiling*]. Do you speak as a director of the Mesaba Iron and Coal Company, or as a casual visitor?

STANNARD. Come, I say.

BRIERLY. I haven't seen you for a year; don't you call that casual?

STANNARD. That's your casualness, not mine. Why, I haven't had a personal line from you since you left New York.

BRIERLY. I'm not in the personal line, you know.

STANNARD. You're hopeless, Eric, from the point of view of your friends. Not even a word about — [*He hesitates.*]

BRIERLY. About what?

STANNARD. Your marriage!

BRIERLY. Well, of course you were astonished.

STANNARD. To put it mildly, yes. Why did you do it, Eric?

BRIERLY. In the first instance I did it for Fanny Pritchard. You know how intolerable the situation was.

STANNARD. Yes.

BRIERLY. There was no other way out.

STANNARD. And you sacrificed yourself?

BRIERLY. There was no sacrifice, Jim; nothing but a hand held out. I released Greta and Fanny at the same moment, by the only means possible.

STANNARD. That would be hard for most people to understand.

BRIERLY. Oh, well, it's hard for most people to understand anything. And the reasons for an action are often swallowed up in the consequences.

STANNARD. Did she know?

BRIERLY. Who, Greta?

STANNARD. Yes.

BRIERLY. Yes, she knew, and accepted the condition very humbly, very nobly.

STANNARD. And the consequences that you spoke of?

BRIERLY [*musingly*]. They have stretched away to infinity.

STANNARD. That's a long way.

BRIERLY. I cast my bread upon the waters.

STANNARD. She has helped you?

BRIERLY [*earnestly*]. She brought the fellowship of pain and heartache to these poor creatures out here, and raised them up as I never could.

STANNARD. Frankly, I never could have believed it.

BRIERLY. Men and women are capable of more things than are dreamed of in your philosophy, Jim. Give them a chance; that's all they need.

STANNARD. Surprising thing, Jack going off so suddenly.

BRIERLY [*sharply*]. Going off? What do you mean?

STANNARD. Why, you knew that Jack Pritchard was dead.

BRIERLY [*looking at him sharply*]. Dead? No, I didn't know. When?

STANNARD. November. Went off just like that — [*snapping his fingers.*] Pneumonia.

BRIERLY. I had no word of it, and I must have missed it in the papers.

STANNARD. Probably the best thing that could have happened. He was simply going from bad to worse — just a mess.

BRIERLY. Poor old Jack; poor Fanny. No two people ever started with a fairer chance. How is she?

STANNARD. You haven't heard from her?

BRIERLY. Not a word; I haven't written or heard from either of them since I left New York.

STANNARD. Not for a year?

BRIERLY. Almost that.

STANNARD. You know, Eric, I said there were others with me; that they were at the hotel.

BRIERLY. Yes.

STANNARD. Fanny and her brother.

BRIERLY. Fanny! Here?

STANNARD. Yes. Dick Matthews was coming with me, and she insisted on being included in the party.

BRIERLY. What for?

STANNARD. Well, she said for the change, but —

BRIERLY. But what?

STANNARD. Frankly?

BRIERLY. What do you think?

STANNARD. I think she came to see you. She knows nothing about — nobody knew anything about — your being married.

BRIERLY [*musingly*]. Of course he wouldn't have told.

STANNARD. Do you mean to say Jack Pritchard knew?

BRIERLY. Oh, yes, he knew; it was a wretched humiliating episode. You say he never spoke of it?

STANNARD. Never. He evaded any questions about Greta; and I just accepted the mystery.

BRIERLY. I think I had better see Fanny at once. She is at the hotel, you say?

STANNARD. She was when I left, resting. A little tired after the journey.

BRIERLY. There is no need for her and Greta to meet.

STANNARD. No.

BRIERLY [*as if to himself*]. It would be better not. She saw Greta once, you know.

STANNARD. Saw her?

BRIERLY. Yes, with him; one night at the theatre. She told me about it.

STANNARD. You are right; it is better they shouldn't meet. Shall you tell her?

BRIERLY. Yes. Will you walk with me or wait here till I get back?

STANNARD [*moving over and putting on his coat*]. Oh, I need the air.

BRIERLY. Good. Come, I'll get my hat and coat. [*They move toward lower L.*]

STANNARD. You know, old man, if there is anything I can do, just call on me.

BRIERLY. Thanks, Jim. I'm just a little upset for the moment. I — I don't know exactly where I stand. [*They pass out at lower L. A moment after, Ellen, the maid, enters at upper L., carrying a student's lamp. She places it on the table at R., and wipes it with a cloth which she carries. Greta enters from back. She carries a fur coat and hat in her hand and moves over to the settee and puts them down.*]

GRETA. Mr. Brierly will not be home for supper, Ellen.

ELLEN. Very well, ma'am. Shall we have the stewed kidneys then?

GRETA. Oh, no; save them for tomorrow night. Mr. Brierly is very fond of them.

ELLEN. I know, ma'am.

GRETA. Has he gone out, do you know?

ELLEN. He and the other gentleman went just a minute ago. [*She moves toward door at lower L. Greta moves over to desk at L.*]

GRETA. Oh, Ellen, I forgot. Mr. Stannard is coming to stay here for a few days. Fix the room next to Mr. Brierly's.

ELLEN. Yes, ma'am.

GRETA [*sitting at desk*]. I am going in to town for about an hour; I'll help you when I get back.

ELLEN. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits at L.*]

[*Greta takes a cheque-book from drawer in desk, fills out a cheque, tears it from the book, replaces book in drawer, rises and moves over to settee at right, puts cheque in pocket of coat and starts to put her hat on, when Ellen re-enters from lower L.*]

ELLEN. A lady, ma'am, to see you.

GRETA. Who is it, Ellen?

ELLEN. She didn't give her name, ma'am, and I've never seen her before. She's all in black, ma'am.

GRETA. Ask her in.

ELLEN. Yes, ma'am. [*Exits at lower L. A moment after Fanny Pritchard enters at lower L. She is dressed in black, with handsome black furs. She comes in with a look of pleased expectancy, which changes to perplexity on seeing Greta, who moves toward her a few steps.*]

FANNY. The maid must have misunderstood me — I asked for Mr. Brierly.

GRETA. I am sorry; he went out but a very few minutes ago. Won't you sit down?

FANNY. Do you think he will be back soon?

GRETA. I can't say, but I hardly think it will be a great while.

FANNY. You are perhaps his secretary?

GRETA. Yes, I am his secretary.

FANNY. I am an old friend of Mr. Brierly's come a long way, with a little party of friends, to see him; I am Mrs. Pritchard.

GRETA [*already having vaguely guessed who the visitor is, controls her feeling, and speaks with a tense quietness*]. I think Mr. Brierly was expecting you.

FANNY [*in surprise*]. Expecting me?

GRETA. Mr. Stannard was here — went out with him.

FANNY. Oh, was he? Do you think they could have gone to the hotel?

GRETA. Perhaps.

FANNY. Could I telephone?

GRETA. Yes. [*She moves over to the telephone.*]

FANNY. Thanks; that is good of you.

GRETA [*takes down the receiver of telephone and calls*]. Give me 37 Main, please.

FANNY. I hate to trouble you so.

GRETA. It is no trouble. [*She speaks into the telephone.*] Is that the hotel? This is Mr. Brierly's house — Mr. Eric Brierly's house. Yes. Has Mr. Brierly

been there? Will you ask him to call up his house, if he comes in? Yes, thank you. [*She hangs up the receiver.*] They will call up if he goes there.

FANNY. Thank you very much. I think I will wait just a little while on the chance. I am not interrupting you, am I?

GRETA. No, I was just going out. [*She turns and moves toward the settee as if to get her coat and hat.*]

FANNY. Do you know, Miss — ? [*She hesitates questioningly, as if expecting Greta to supply the name. Greta turns to her.*]

GRETA. Yes?

FANNY. I was going to say that your face seemed familiar to me. It came to me the moment I saw you.

GRETA. Resemblances are very haunting sometimes.

FANNY. Yes, aren't they? Are you from the West?

GRETA. No.

FANNY. Have you ever been in New York?

GRETA. Not for very long.

FANNY. I suppose your work with Mr. Brierly must be very interesting, very absorbing.

GRETA. Yes, it is very.

FANNY. How long have you been with Mr. Brierly?

GRETA. Some — some months.

FANNY. And of course you have become imbued with his quaint social theories?

GRETA. No one could live — be associated with Mr. Brierly without learning to hate injustice and cruelty.

FANNY [*coolly, watching her closely*]. Indeed? And is there much cruelty, much injustice?

GRETA. Any is much. —

FANNY [*lightly*]. I see you dream of perfection.

GRETA [*in a low voice*]. I have learned to strive for it.

FANNY. How interesting! Does one ever achieve it?

GRETA. I don't know; one can only try. I know you will excuse me now, if I leave you alone, but — I have errands in town and I don't think Mr. Brierly will be long.

FANNY. Please don't bother about me; I shall be very comfortable with your wonderful fire here, till Mr. Brierly comes. [*The telephone bell rings sharply, and Greta moves toward it quickly. Fanny, nearer to it, turns and takes down the receiver.*] No, let me, please. [*Greta falters, and turns partly away with a look of fear and suspense on her face, during Fanny Pritchard's talk over the telephone. She picks up her coat from the settee and puts it on.*] Yes, this is Mr. Brierly's house. [*Smiling.*] Who do you think it is? Can't you guess? How are you, Eric; it is so good to hear you. — How did you know? — Jim Stannard is a traitor; he was promised to secrecy. Yes, do tell him, — Were you surprised? — That's because you are a very unimaginative person. — Just as you like. I'll wait for you here, or come back to the hotel. —

What? Oh, well, perhaps that will be better. — Yes, I will wait for you. — Anyone here? — Yes, your secretary, who has been very hospitable. — Your secretary, secretary — What? [*The smile leaving her face.*] Mrs. Who? — Who? — Your wife, Eric! [*She drops the receiver and it hangs down from the table, then rises slowly and turns to Greta, who is a pitiable sight of distress.*]

FANNY [*in a hard, vibrant voice*]. Who are you?

GRETA [*in a low voice*]. His wife.

FANNY. You mean that — ?

GRETA. I am Mrs. Brierly.

FANNY. Why did you mislead me?

GRETA. I had no intention of misleading you.

FANNY. Where have I seen you before — where? [*Drawing back as it comes to her that Greta Ellis is before her.*] You are that woman?

GRETA. Yes.

FANNY [*transfixed with a sort of dismay*]. What a horror! That you should come into my life — again! Oh, what a horror!

GRETA. I have always known the time would come when we should meet. But I was not prepared — yet.

FANNY. How could you be prepared? Would conscience ever give you peace?

GRETA. I — I am a great coward.

FANNY. Where would you hope to find the courage to face one whom you have so hatefully wronged?

GRETA. I have told you, I have no courage.

FANNY. What have I done that you should be thrust between me and the ones I care for? Why do such women as you thrive on the pain and humiliation of others?

GRETA [*in an agony*]. Don't — don't; please don't, you hurt me.

FANNY. I want to hurt you. Do you think the months and months of degrading torment that I have suffered through you — and now this new shame that you have put upon me — do you think they do not cry out for some penalty?

GRETA. I have never tried to shirk the penalty.

FANNY. Are you to go your ruthless, wicked way, embittering honest women, blighting honest men with no word of truth to hinder you? You ruined my husband —

GRETA. No! No!

FANNY. I say yes. And now by what cajolery or deception, I can't conceive, you have taken from me a friend dearer to me than such as you could ever know.

GRETA. Stop! That is not so.

FANNY. How dare you deny?

GRETA. My association with your husband was a mad folly — it may have been a great sin; but I chose it, or rather he dragged me into it and I went, desperately, rather than starve.

FANNY. Starve!

GRETA. Yes, starve, or suffer something worse. And when I had sunk to the very depths, and tasted the very dregs, with no thought or hope of escape Eric came and took me; and because he would take me in no other way he married me. Since then, through him, the precious things I had lost or flung away have come back: He has let me share his work among these lost creatures out here, but nothing else in his life have I shared.

FANNY. Nothing else?

GRETA. Nothing.

FANNY. Are you trying to justify the evil you have brought into my life?

GRETA. I am trying to tell you why he has done these things.

FANNY. Why?

GRETA. Not through cajolery on my part; not through my power for evil.

FANNY. Why — why?

GRETA. Because he loved you — *you* — understand; not me!

FANNY. Because he loved me!

GRETA. Through his love for you he has saved me, and I am grateful, humbly grateful. He is waiting for you now as he has always waited.

FANNY. Always — waited! — If I have spoken harshly —

GRETA. For God's sake, let me go! [*She exits at upper L.*]

CURTAIN

ACT IV

SCENE. *The same as Act III.*

A half hour or more has elapsed since the preceding act. The early dusk of a winter's afternoon has fallen; the only light is from the glimmering fire R. which plays over the figure of Fanny seated on the settee. Ellen, the maid, enters from upper L. During the ensuing scene she draws the curtains at window, lights the lamps, etc.

ELLEN. Hasn't Mr. Brierly come in yet?

FANNY. Not yet.

ELLEN. Is the fire all right?

FANNY. Yes, thank you.

ELLEN. Would you like a cup of tea?

FANNY. No, thank you. [*As Ellen turns to go.*] Did Mrs. Brierly go out?

ELLEN. Yes, she went out. [*Ellen exits at upper L. Fanny continues to gaze into the flickering fire. A moment*

later the outer door is heard to close, and Brierly enters at lower L. He goes to Fanny, taking her hand as she rises.]

BRIERLY. Fanny!

FANNY. Eric!

BRIERLY. How good it is to see you.

FANNY. I shouldn't have stayed, Eric — but I have come so far. [*Breaking down.*] Oh, why didn't you tell me — let me know, and spare me the humiliation of all this!

BRIERLY. Where is Greta?

FANNY. She — she went out.

BRIERLY. I've been on the point of writing a dozen times. Then the idea was pushed aside by the always possible, always postponed visit to New York. You know the endless excuses that will halt a letter?

FANNY. Was it fair to me, Eric? Oh, was it fair?

BRIERLY. My reasons were oversubtle, perhaps, but — I thought them sufficient.

FANNY. I felt there was something back of your silence — something you were keeping from me. Wouldn't it have been more worthy of our old — friendship, to have sent me word, Eric, just a word.

BRIERLY. I couldn't.

FANNY. Was it the memory of an old love, or loyalty to a new that prevented?

BRIERLY. Don't make it harder for me, Fanny. My silence was a folly; I see it now. I never dreamed of your coming here.

FANNY [*bitterly*]. So abject a surrender was beyond belief!

BRIERLY. That is ungenerous to us both. I did the best — the only thing I could do. I had promised to help you — and there was no other way.

FANNY. No other way? Why?

ERIC. Fanny, Fanny — don't let's go into it.

FANNY. I must know.

BRIERLY. I'd rather not.

FANNY. I must know.

BRIERLY. He made it impossible; refused to let her go; swore he would follow if she left him. My protection was the only solution.

FANNY. Well?

BRIERLY. I could offer that but on one condition.

FANNY. What?

BRIERLY. Marriage.

FANNY [*half in doubt, half in wonder*]. And you did that — for me? That was the reason?

BRIERLY. The only reason.

FANNY. Then — then, Eric, you will come with me?

BRIERLY. Go with you!

FANNY. Yes. I need you. I have come for you.

BRIERLY [*taking her hands gently; the last flicker of a love that is really dead showing in his eyes*]. Fanny!

FANNY. You will, Eric?

BRIERLY [*after a moment, shaking his head slowly*]. I can't leave these people.

FANNY. I will stay and help you.

BRIERLY. It would kill you.

FANNY. You are not frank with me.

BRIERLY. I tell you the truth, Fanny. And what about her?

FANNY. He is gone; she no longer needs your protection.

BRIERLY. It is impossible to toss an obligation off as one would an old coat.

FANNY. You assumed the obligation for me. I release you.

BRIERLY. We can't simplify like that, Fanny; we can't, my dear. Right feeling, honour, self-respect — all sorts of things that you and I hold very dear, are involved.

FANNY. It is monstrous that she should come between us.

BRIERLY. It wasn't she, Fanny. Life intervened.

FANNY. Oh, Eric, you're blind, you're blind.

BRIERLY. What is it you mean?

FANNY. You don't know why you will not leave these people? Why it is you forbid me to come into your life again?

BRIERLY. What are you trying to say, Fanny?

FANNY. Nothing tells you what I am trying to say?

BRIERLY. No.

FANNY. You love this woman, Eric, better than anything in all the world.

BRIERLY [*looking at her wonderingly for a moment. Then as if speaking to himself*]. God knows, I believe I do!

FANNY. It is rather cruel, my dear, for again I have to pay.

BRIERLY [*very gently, tenderly*]. Sooner or later, willingly or unwillingly, we all have to pay the price of life.

FANNY. That means you no longer care.

BRIERLY. It means I have had to pay too.

FANNY [*bitterly*]. Men spend, and spend, and spend; they never pay.

BRIERLY. That isn't so, Fanny. Discontent, hateful sacrifices, are as common to men as to women. Do you think ten years ago when I offered you all I had, and you chose otherwise, that there was no pain, no disappointment? That I didn't pay? Do you think my life out here with these ignorant creatures hasn't been a constant fight against every instinct, every habit, every inclination that I possess?

FANNY. You have chosen your own way.

BRIERLY. For one reason or another we all do that. I figured out that it is better to pay as one goes, rather than to take life on credit, and heap up debts that can only be settled by disillusionment and regret.

FANNY. You have no regrets?

BRIERLY. I've had many — many; but I've laid them away and covered them up with new hopes, new illusions.

FANNY. I have no hopes or illusions to cover mine with.

BRIERLY. God help you, Fanny dear, if you can't find both in your children, and in the hearts of your friends.

FANNY. It is all very well, Eric, for you to talk like this, but it is no consolation for me. Duty and self-sacrifice seem to exalt you, but for me they are only the names of things that make me very uncomfortable.

BRIERLY. You don't mean that.

FANNY. I do — I do. And now I must say good-bye.

BRIERLY. No, Fanny, you must not go that way. Everything that our friendship has meant for both of us can't be summed up, and the account closed, with that sort of a good-bye.

FANNY. It is the end, Eric.

BRIERLY. There will be no end for me as long as memory lasts.

FANNY. I shall learn to forget.

[*Ellen, the maid, appears at door, upper L.*]

ELLEN. There is a gentleman asking for Mrs. Pritchard, sir.

FANNY [*to Brierly*]. It is my brother, Dick. I asked him to come for me. [*To Ellen.*] Say that I am ready.

ELLEN. Yes, ma'am.

[*Exits at lower L. Brierly picks up Fanny's cloak and holds it for her.*]

FANNY. It must be late.

BRIERLY. Not very; the days are very short now.

FANNY [*fastening her cloak*]. Yes, it is quite dark outside. [*She puts out her hand.*] Good-bye, Eric.

BRIERLY [*taking her hand*]. Good-bye, Fanny. [*They move toward door at lower L.*] I shall see you tomorrow?

FANNY [*steadily*]. No, I start back tomorrow. [*He opens the door.*] Please — please don't come out; I'd rather you'd not. [*She passes out, Brierly standing by the open door till the sound of the outer door is heard closing. He turns to the window at back, raises the curtain, and stands looking out for a moment, then turns back into the room. He goes to the telephone and calls.*]

BRIERLY. Give me Terrace 14 — Yes — Helloa — is that you, Molloy — Brierly speaking — yes. I shall not be at the meeting tonight. No — can't be helped. Well, do the best you can. Of course — postpone a decision till tomorrow. Don't let Cassidy get away with anything — he's counting on you — Good-bye. [*He moves over to fireplace, fills his pipe, draws at it for a moment, then exits at lower R. A moment later the outer door is heard closing and then Greta enters at upper L., followed by Dr. Graham. They move over toward the fire.*]

GRETA. It was so good of you to give me a lift, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Dear me, I'm glad you didn't have to walk home. It is pretty sharp outside. [*They spread their hands to the blaze.*]

GRETA. Yes, it is bitter.

DOCTOR. You know I am not very enthusiastic about this sudden going away tomorrow.

GRETA. It is a journey I had to take sooner or later.

DOCTOR. Rather unexpected, wasn't it?

GRETA. Yes, I only had word after you were here this afternoon.

DOCTOR. Be gone long?

GRETA [*taking off her hat and coat and placing them on the settee*]. I — I can't tell exactly. You'll take good care of Eric, won't you?

DOCTOR. How can one take good care of a man like that? You should carry him off with you.

GRETA [*shaking her head*]. He wouldn't go. A man of forty-five with an idea, you know.

DOCTOR. What about a man of forty-five and an idea?

GRETA. It's meat and drink and everything else.

DOCTOR [*dryly*]. Is that so? Well, I have my own private notion that when an idea comes into violent contact with a man of forty-five he's in danger of making an ass of himself. [*The door at lower R. opens and Brierly enters.*]

BRIERLY. Helloa, I thought I heard voices in here.

DOCTOR. We've just been talking about you.

GRETA [*trying to conceal her agitation*]. Why, Eric, I —I thought you had gone.

BRIERLY. Where?

GRETA. To the hotel — to the men's meeting.

BRIERLY. I decided not to go.

GRETA. Oh!

DOCTOR. I have just been upbraiding this lady for running off and leaving us.
[*Brierly and Greta glance swiftly at one another, then away.*]

GRETA [*with an attempt at lightness*]. Journeys have to be taken.

DOCTOR. I think she ought to take you along.

BRIERLY. I haven't even been invited, Doctor.

DOCTOR [*jocularly*]. Oh, I see it's an escape.

BRIERLY. Something like that.

DOCTOR [*drawing on his gloves*]. Well, we shall just have to smoke our pipes and wait.

GRETA. Do take supper with us, Doctor.

BRIERLY. Yes, do.

DOCTOR. Sorry I can't tonight. I'll come when you're alone. You'll need me then.

BRIERLY. Yes, I'll need you then.

DOCTOR [*to Greta, taking her hand*]. Good-bye; come back soon and don't forget us.

GRETA. I never forget, Doctor.

DOCTOR. Good-night, Eric.

BRIERLY. Good-night. [*They move to door at upper L.*]

DOCTOR. Don't come out. I know the way by this time.

BRIERLY. It's pretty dark outside.

DOCTOR [*as they pass out*]. Oh, I can see.

[*Greta stands for a moment looking after them. There is the sound of the door closing. She turns and quickly picks up her hat and coat from the settee and moves to steps at back. She is just about to exit when Brierly reappears at upper L. and sees her.*]

BRIERLY. Greta! [*She turns toward him. He closes the door.*] For God's sake, what is all this!

GRETA. I am going.

BRIERLY. Why?

GRETA. Because — because I think you were right; it is better for me to go.

BRIERLY. I didn't put it that way; or if so, you misunderstood me. I meant that it was better to go if you wanted to go.

GRETA [*controlling herself with an effort*]. I do want to go.

BRIERLY. You have changed your mind?

GRETA. Yes.

BRIERLY. But why?

GRETA. Don't you know?

BRIERLY. Because she came?

GRETA. Yes.

BRIERLY. That meant nothing.

GRETA. It meant everything.

BRIERLY. How do you mean — everything?

GRETA. It brought back my memory, showed me I had grown dull.

BRIERLY. What is it, Greta?

GRETA. Have you forgotten what he said that night, just as we left him? [*He is silent, showing that he knows what she means.*] Neither have I. Though I have tried these months and months to forget, it seems dug into my brain. The words drum at my ears even when I sleep. "He took me because he loved her." "He took me because he loved her." I am not saying this resentfully, Eric, believe me. You never pretended otherwise. You've always been honest with me. But when we met today, she and I —

BRIERLY [*very gently*]. Greta.

GRETA. It came to me like some great, overwhelming agony why you had asked me to go. [*He makes a protesting gesture, but she goes on hurriedly.*] I know it was because you wished to spare me pain, but I could have stood it — anything rather than the shame of what did happen. Don't you know, Eric,

that I would leave nothing undone, stop at nothing to give you happiness? If you had only told me, Eric, that she was coming, that that was why you wished me to go.

BRIERLY. I knew no more of her coming than you.

GRETA. You mean that — that you didn't know that he — he was dead?

BRIERLY. I knew nothing.

GRETA. Are you telling me the truth, Eric? — Oh, forgive me. I didn't mean that.

BRIERLY. I know you didn't.

GRETA [*a little wildly*]. But he is dead, and she has come for you. It is right that she should; right that you should go to her. That is why I am going.

BRIERLY. Greta, I don't want you to leave me.

GRETA. Don't make it harder; I have no courage, no strength to spare.

BRIERLY. Don't you understand, Greta? I want you to stay with me always, never to leave me.

GRETA. No, no, you don't know what you say.

BRIERLY. I've been a blind man, groping this way and that for the most precious thing life holds, not seeing that it was at my side.

GRETA. *She* is the most precious thing life holds for you.

BRIERLY. So I may have thought; but when she came today I knew it wasn't so.

GRETA. That can't be true.

BRIERLY. There is nothing so dead as a love that is dead. She is gone; she understood.

GRETA. Eric, Eric, I want to believe, but I can't.

BRIERLY. You don't trust me.

GRETA. I can't. I can't, I tell you, Eric. I know so well your generosity toward all but —

BRIERLY. But whom?

GRETA. Yourself. You have sacrificed to others everything that most men cling to. I must be big enough now to save you from yourself.

BRIERLY. Don't put me off that way, Greta, don't. I know you care. I know you do.

GRETA. I do — I do more than for anything in life.

BRIERLY. Then don't let this fancy keep us apart.

GRETA. Oh, I want to stay.

BRIERLY. Greta! [*He moves as if to take her in his arms.*]

GRETA [*she puts out her hands and steps back*]. Wait, Eric, wait. I want you to help me in this — I so need your help. Now listen, dear, listen to what I say quite calmly, and know that every word means my love for you.

BRIERLY. What is it?

GRETA. Let me go as you had planned for me, a year —

BRIERLY. No.

GRETA. Six months.

BRIERLY [*vehemently*]. No, no, I can't. I have waited all my life, Greta; waited until I lost the sense of what I waited for, not knowing that it had come to me, that it was strengthening, building up the best of me! You brought the things I've dreamed of; generously, humbly you have given them; comradeship, sympathy, the help of mind and hand; all that make love between man and woman enduring. Don't go from me now, just as I've wakened, just as I've found you.

GRETA [*with great feeling*]. Oh, I can't believe that I deserve it.

BRIERLY. Everyone in all this blessed world deserves happiness. Greta, I love you; stay with me.

GRETA. I'm not brave enough to go. [*She sways toward him; he takes her gently in his arms.*]

CURTAIN

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